

A THEOLOGY OF SAMOAN CHRISTIAN
IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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This project is dedicated
to my wife and family, Tufanua,
Sese, Eli, Ana, and Lahaina.

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ABSTRACT

As a Samoan minister in the United States, I have been intrigued with the religious lifestyles of our people in America. Samoans are religious people. Their religion is fascinating. What is even more intriguing to me is the complex culture of our people. Certain aspects of Samoan culture are so deep-rooted that the people still cling to them after 150 years of Christian training and belief.

While 20th century modernism has brought some notable changes to the Samoan islands, the basic framework of Samoan society continues without change. Both governments, the independent State of Western Samoa and the "unorganized territory" of American Samoa, are firmly based on the ancient Samoan cultural system of Matai (chiefs).

Immigration to the outside world, however, has brought a totally different lifestyle to the Samoan people. The different environment in America has revealed both the strengths and weaknesses of Samoan Christianity and culture.

As a Samoan minister to Samoan congregations in Hawaii and Southern California, I have been challenged to describe the unique position of Samoan immigrants in the United States. At first, I thought that the sociological and psychological aspects of the Samoan experience would bring about a meaningful understanding, but as this project will show, it is the theological manifestations that actually

bring out the depth and meaning of the Samoan experience in America.

I have traced the history of our people. My observations as a religious leader, together with my experience as a resource person for various government agencies seeing understanding of our people in America, validate my research of the Samoan-American condition.

My observations are confirmed by documented studies of immigrant behavior. These documented studies are primary sources relating the experiences of Samoans in America.

Since there is no model for an immigrant theology, I have read and studied some of the more influential Christian thinkers of the 20th century. Some significant insights were gained from this study.

The Bible, however, has held a dominant place in my theological investigation. The experience of the Israelites as they progressed from nomadic life to city life in Canaan becomes the starting-point towards a theology for Samoan-Americans. It is a contextual theology. I have taken the story of our people and related it to the story of God's people in the Bible.

My study of the Old Testament prophets resulted in emphasizing a new concept of the Biblical God for our people. This new concept of God calls for the humanization of the Samoan-American condition. As the Israelites followed this God in their exodus experience, the movement of

the Samoans from Polynesia to America has been influenced by the revelations of the same God who liberated Israel from bondage.

Thus, culture-consciousness and the Christian faith of the Samoan people, confronting a technological society in America, becomes the subject of critical reflection in my theological investigation. It is a significant part of my work as a religious leader of the Samoan community in America.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Issues

The purpose of this project is to show the intricate struggle in the life of Samoan Christian immigrants in the United States. For the Samoans who have come to the United States, immigration means a migration from a homogeneous-agriculture way of life to a technological-industrialized society. How the Samoan immigrants have adjusted to these two different ways of life in the United States is a very significant phenomenon. Since most of these Samoan immigrants are Christians, the project will investigate their experience in American Society from a theological perspective. The theology emerging out of this investigation may help at least, to minimize the tensions and conflicts in the Samoan Christian's encounter in a different culture in American society.

Historically, the problem is not new to American people. Migratory movements of great numbers of people have been the form of population movements. This is evidenced by the great influx of immigrants to the United States from Europe and other parts of the world. Indeed, the history of the American people is the history of immigration. Oscar Handlin observes this truth of the American people as follows: "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America.

Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history."¹

The Samoan immigrants, however, represent a very different perspective. The following reasons help to reveal this difference:

1. Samoans come from a homogeneous and agricultural society.
2. Twentieth century America is a technological industrialized society.
3. The Samoan immigration is a part of the Pacific migration movement and very much different from European migration in the past centuries.
4. Their immigration problems and concerns represent a vital challenge to their Christian faith.

Moving from one culture to another has always been a human phenomenon in history. The immigration to a different society involves major social concerns which have direct bearing on the attitudes and behaviors of both cultures and societies. This is a phenomenon that is fundamental to the understanding of culture, for the immigration experience reveals both the strengths and weaknesses of either culture. More important, the immigrant experience also reveals the problems which eventually become social issues, and for the Samoan immigrant, the issues continue to haunt them as they establish their lives in America. The problems have also brought drastic consequences upon the social, political, and economic

¹Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951), p.3.

systems in America. This will be seen in the chapters dealing with the social concerns of the Samoan immigrants.

The basic problem that the immigrants face is that of self-identification, that is, the question, "Who am I?" For the Samoan immigrant, the question is new because it was never asked in Samoa. In the new world, it becomes a problem, not only because it is new, but because there are now various facets to the question of self-identification.

The new social context in America makes the problem of self-identification and self-location especially depressing for second and third generations of Samoans in America. For unless they find the answers to who and what they are, they may never live and function as responsible citizens in American society. Will Herberg observes this profound truth of the immigrant experience:

Unless he can so locate himself, he cannot tell himself, and others will not be able to know, who and what he is; he will remain "anonymous," a nobody -- which is intolerable.²

The immigrants have also made lasting contributions to the history of America. The incredible mobility of American society has revealed how the immigrants became the "mainstay of the American economy."³ The immigrant's search for cultural understanding in their struggle of encounter with the

²Will Herberg, Protestant-Catholic-Jew (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 12.

³Ibid, p. 10.

host society becomes an avenue of "give-and-take." They have been proud and contributing citizens in American society.

In addition to the identity crisis, another important question for this project is: What will be the Samoan Christian's lasting contribution to the American Scene? The answers to this question, or issue, will be attempted from a theological perspective.

Sociology and anthropology have made studies of the immigrant problem. Of course, one has to consider that not all immigrants have serious problems. But studies have revealed that the problems that immigrants repeatedly identify and which are often quoted and verified by community workers, social workers, ministers, teachers, and administrators have been in the areas of health, housing, education, communication, and employment. Indeed, they are very basic social needs.

Various findings from studies made have also suggested several recommendations to help alleviate these immigrant problems. The recommendations, however, have only touched the surface of the problems. For whenever the sanctity of life, or quality of life is affected, then the depth and scope of the problem is profoundly important. This project will, thus, show that a theological orientation is most relevant to the sanctity and quality of life.

During the eight years I have served as a minister of Samoan immigrant churches in Honolulu and Southern California,

I have dealt with some very profound culture conflicts and tensions among our people. Their life-styles have changed radically. Some of their most cherished cultural values have created tensions and hostilities in this different environment. Both the local and national levels of government have been greatly affected by these cultural conflicts and tensions. But more important, perhaps, problems of adjustments and changes become so critical that their faith in God is tested in a very profound and radical way. Loyalty to God becomes caught up between the struggle of two different cultures. A Samoan's Christian faith is pulled apart in the tension between two very different kinds of cultures and values. For what does Jesus Christ mean for a people who come from a homogeneous and agricultural way of life to a highly technological and industrialized society like America? What place can the Bible and God have in the lives of people struggling between two different ways of living?

As a pastor to these immigrant congregations, I have found that moving from a Polynesian culture to a Western culture strongly recalls the Biblical experience of Israel, moving from nomadic-life in the desert to city-life in Canaan. Moving from the islands in the South Pacific to a Western society is like that of the Israelites going from desert-life to city-life in Canaan. Such migration always mean the carrying of an old culture into a new one. Can a theology be devised which will enable the Samoan immigrant to embrace

both cultures?

The assumption is that a theological orientation can provide valuable insights, not only for the Samoan immigrants, but also for the immigrant problem at large. I have learned from my pastoral experience that the Biblical tradition provides the most relevant insights and models for such a task.

B. Methodology

The methodology employed in this project will be sociological and theological analysis. Since the amount of literature on the subject is very rare, my experience and observations as a minister in this context will emerge as very significant. There are two unpublished theses on the immigrant problem, and one published study.⁴ They throw very little light on the religious behavior of Samoans in both Hawaii and California.

There are good materials available on the culture and islands of Samoa. Many historical works were done by missionaries and German writers in the late 19th century, but many of these are out of print. My purpose in this project is to

⁴Aliifaatu Laolagi, "A Descriptive Study of Samoan Families Who Have Settled in San Francisco" (Unpublished Theses, San Francisco State College, 1961). David B. Eyde, "A Preliminary Study of a Group of Samoan Migrants in Hawaii." (Unpublished Research Project, University of Hawaii, 1954). Ramsay Shu and Adele S. Satele, "The Samoan Community in Southern California: Conditions and Needs." (Chicago: Asian American Mental Health Research Center, 1977).

focus on the immigrant aspects of the Samoan people in America. Since I am a Samoan minister, my personal observations and experiences will emerge as more reliable in this project.

Many journals from the South Pacific, Australia, and New Zealand will be consulted, for they do document some related studies on the people of the South Pacific.

The overall problems of immigrants, find many published books and materials available. While this literature focuses on immigrant behavior and Christian faith in a new culture, I will analyze materials in the hope of finding some patterns that apply directly to the specific problems of the Samoan community in the United States. This must be done in view of the cultural characteristics and uniqueness of the Samoan immigrant. While there are many similarities of adjustments and behaviors among immigrants, differences stemming directly from their various cultural characteristics must never be minimized.

Finally, in the final chapter dealing with the actual formation of a theology, I will first analyze some notable theological systems, to understand how they dealt with the Christian faith. This theological analysis will be employed in the hope that the proper direction may emerge towards a theology for the Samoan immigrant. But basically the Biblical insights and models will be the starting point for a theology which I hope to emerge in the course of this project.

Hence, the migrant experience of the Biblical people

will be the starting-point for this theological investigation. For it is the migrant experience of Israel that permeates throughout the Old Testament. And while the New Testament also reveal valuable insights and models, the missionary zeal for the early Christians indicate some differences to the migrant experience of Israel. Nevertheless, the New Testament speaks of the early Christian's missionary endeavors as coming into confrontation with another culture. The confrontation of encountering another culture brought forth a theology that spelled out the nature of God as one who "comes" and "goes."

History testifies to the great migration periods of mankind. These great periods have shown transition of old and new cultures and civilizations. The entry of Israel into Canaan came out of a large movement of people in the "Fertile Crescent." The rise and fall of the Roman Empire came out of migrational periods. The fall of Rome and the beginning of the so-called "Dark Ages" came out of migration and the invasion of people from the North, called Barbarians. And the birth of America was the product of constant migration of population from Europe. These monumental periods of history have brought forth great nations and cultures. And it must be part of God's revelation in history. They were certainly creative periods of human history.

Now I do not even dare to dream that the migration of the South Pacific Islanders to America will bring forth

something as monumental as Rome, or America. Rather it is in the simple and ordinary migration of Samoans, our own people, that I am concerned with, and this is "extraordinary" enough for me. For it is by nature a witness to the Biblical God who "comes" and "goes." For does not the plight of all immigrants reflect how the God of the Bible has revealed Himself and continues to reveal Himself? And that is the challenge that this project attempts.

C. The Emigration Process

The history of the emigration of the people of Samoa resulted from many historical events. For American Samoa in particular, the emigration process began after World War II. This flow of migration from central Polynesia to American soil stands out as one of the most significant sequel of World War II in the Pacific Basin. For the Samoans were never to be quite the same again since this migration began.

How and why these people went through the "escape from paradise" is a phenomenon that has puzzled some Western observers. Today, even the Samoan people themselves, after living in the States for some time, now wonder about the same phenomenon.

One has to go back to the turn of the century to find the beginning of American involvement in Samoa. For ever since June 2, 1722, when Commodore Jacob Roggeveen, commanding the Dutch West India Company's exploring expedition, Samoa and

western civilization became aware of each other. In 1830, John Williams of the London Missionary Society arrived with Christianity. Between 1830 and 1900, German, Great Britain, and the United States became very much involved in the history of Samoa. And on November 9, 1899, the three world powers signed an agreement which divided the Samoan Islands among them. The United States accepted Tutuila, Aunu'u, and Manua (now called American Samoa), the rest of Samoa become a German responsibility (now the independent state of Western Samoa). "Great Britain abandoned all official claims in Samoa, accepted instead the cession of German rights in Tonga ...Solomon Islands and in West Africa."⁵

From 1900 to 1951, American Samoa came under the authorization and administration of the United States Navy. During these 50 years of naval administration, 27 governors, all naval officers, were appointed by the Navy to serve in the highest executive office in American Samoa.

The Department of the United States Navy conducted the social, political, and economic affairs of American Samoa. These 50 years of naval administration brought the islands out of homogeneity into the civilized world. Samoa was now presented with a new set of values. Her official name was changed from "Eastern Samoa" to American Samoa.

⁵J.A.C. Gray, Amerika Samoa and Its Naval Administration (Annapolis, MD: Naval Academy, 1960), p. 101.

By World War II, the economic form of American Samoa was transformed from a barter system to a monetary system. "The revenues of the government of American Samoa from all sources increased from a ration of 2 to 1 at the end of the war. In brief, the war brought a money economy into American Samoa."⁶

Unfortunately, the economic situation failed to meet the rapid rise of population, and the "increasingly expensive tastes of the people."⁷ American Samoa's population increased much faster than the flow of American cash into the islands. So in 1950, Fagatogo, the town in the islands, became a "tropical slum"⁸ And thus began the emigration process.

The economic situation in American Samoa became so desperate in 1952 that about a thousand Samoans migrated en masse to Hawaii, transported by their old friend, the navy.⁹

According to a study of Samoan migrants in Hawaii, sponsored by the University of Hawaii in 1954, under the supervision of Professor Leonard Mason and Dr. Douglas Yamamura, the following reasons resulted in a large migration of Samoans in 1952.

1. In 1950 the U.S. Department of the Interior inaugurated civilian administration in American Samoa.
2. This resulted in the sudden and disastrous withdrawal of the U.S. Navy.

⁶Ibid, p. 245.

⁷Ibid, p. 247.

⁸Ibid, p. 246.

⁹Ibid, p. 263.

3. Loss of income from the Naval Station reverted American Samoa's economy to a subsistence level.
4. Imported goods were no longer afforded by Samoans.
5. Communication systems which were made possible by the Navy broke down.
6. Unemployment rose. Civil service status discontinued.
7. Skilled and Semi-skilled persons found no market for their talents.¹⁰

Therefore, when the Navy offered passenger space aboard the USS President Jackson in 1952, 958 Samoans seized the opportunity to migrate to Hawaii. And so the pattern of emigration to Hawaii and the Continental United States emerged, and continues to this day. With the status of "American Nationals," and constant scheduled flights by Pan American Airlines and Continental Airlines, traveling back and forth, to Samoa and back to America, is now a very significant way of life for the Samoan people.

¹⁰David B. Eyde, "A Preliminary Study of a Group of Samoan Migrants in Hawaii." (Unpublished Research Project, University of Hawaii, 1954).

CHAPTER 2

CHRISTIANITY IN SAMOA

A. Missionary Activity

The introduction of Christianity in Samoa is an interesting subject for research. While 1830 marks the beginning of John Williams' missionary work in Samoa, numerous evidences confirm the arrival of Christianity in other parts of Samoa before this date. There was a party of Tahitian Christians who managed to reach Samoa by accident, and there are evidences of an American Christian who was nicknamed "Salemi" and lived in Pago Pago (capital of American Samoa) under the family of Mauga.¹ But it was not until 1830 that the first organized Christian group arrived in Samoa. This has been accepted as the official introduction of Christianity into Samoa, primarily because John Williams and his missionary party included a Samoan Christian and also because they arrived at the family and village of Samoa's leading royal family of that time, Malietao Vainuupo. This senior family was practically regarded as "King of Samoa."

Williams' reception was far from hostile. He was immediately adopted by the Malietao family, accorded the high honors due a great teacher, and assisted in his mission. The

¹One of the "Paramount" chiefs in Samoa.

rituals and cosmogony of the new religion were promptly incorporated into the native system. The Christian God was accorded a high position in the supernatural hierarchy, and before many years Samoan converts were spreading the gospel elsewhere in Oceania.

In Samoa, where religion was never as highly institutionalized as elsewhere in Polynesia, the mission teachers simply replaced native priests in the new system, and the matais,² formerly the families' intercessors with supernatural forces, simply became deacons in village churches.

It is said that, "The history of Samoa is the history of the L.M.S.,"³ but it should be said that it is the history of the covenantal love of God. The history of Samoa has very little meaning, if any, until her people entered the bonds of the covenantal relationship with God. Certainly, they were simple-minded people, just being led out of the desert of wars and heathenism, but in their own naive way they perceived God as the "Power" who could protect them and supply their needs. The simple-minded agricultural community did not understand all the rituals and ceremonies within Christianity, "but they says they knows it does 'em good."⁴

²matais: Elected chiefs of extended families.

³N. Goodall, A History of the L.M.S. 1895-1945 (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 352. L.M.S. stands for London Missionary Society.

⁴W.P. Morrel, Britain in the Pacific Islands (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 56.

John Williams could have been thought of as "the Moses" who led them out of darkness and brought them into the covenantal love of God. It was to his pioneering work and his colleagues' endeavors, that is attributed the acceptance of the Christian faith.

A Christian community has been gathered in the tropical islands of Samoa....The Samoan's knowledge of the Bible in very many cases has changed the heart and lifted the old pagan life to the level of conscious communion with God.⁵

The missionaries quickly found success among the Samoans, since there was no strong religious faith to combat Christianity. But more important, communalism based on authority and leadership of the chiefs facilitated the mass conversion of the people. The acceptance of Christianity rested entirely on the great deliberations and debates among the chiefs and their councils. Village meetings were called by the chiefs to explore the issue. John Williams reported that these meetings and deliberations showed remarkable wisdom and insight, for it was in these meetings that the orators spoke with great wisdom and emotions. The new faith necessitated a crossroads decision for the Samoan people.

One favorable argument for the acceptance of Christianity was the opportunity to gain the white man's valuable

⁵R. Lovett, History of the L.M.S 1795-1895, (London: Oxford University Press, 1899), p. 403.

possessions such as metals, tools, clothing, guns, etc. Holmes relates other arguments as follows:

Some chiefs claimed that if all villages accepted the new religion wars would be prevented. For some, the ceremonialism of the worship services was appealing. The Samoan love and appreciation of oratory brought a favorable response from many who enjoyed listening to the almost interminable sermons delivered by the mission pastors. Even today the role of substitute pastor is one eagerly sought by village Talking Chiefs anxious to exhibit their versatility and eloquence in the area of ceremonial and formal rhetoric.⁶

The Malietoa whom Williams had encountered, said to his people,

I should try the experiment of becoming his (God's) worshipper, and then, if he can protect me you may with safety follow my example. After three week's probation Jehovah's protection was deemed sufficient and nearly all Malietoa's people renounced heathenism by eating their totem.⁷

Though this was a picture of a human being's suspicious nature that drove him to test something before accepting it, yet it depicts the kind of group concern that was current and developed in the time of the missionaries. Whenever a matai became a convert, it was common for him to instruct the members of his household to do likewise.

The missionaries found it to the mission's advantage to use the authority and influence of the chiefs. This set a very significant pattern in the progress of Christianity in

⁶Lowell D. Holmes, Samoan Village (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974), 60.

⁷Morrel, p. 55.

Samoa, a pattern which continues to be practiced in Samoan churches in Hawaii and California. After 150 years of Christianity in Samoa, the authority and influence of the chiefs in religious matters continues to be highly respected in a Samoan local church. The beginning of a new church in Hawaii and California is usually traced to a chief who calls his household together to form a new church. The large Samoan household, members of which obey their chief's desire, makes a pretty good sized church for a start. In a congregational meeting, the chief will always rely on his household to support whatever he may stand for. In Samoa, this reliance is never questioned, for congregational meetings usually mean the meeting of elders and chiefs.

Moreover, the Samoans are a people who highly respect authority. Obedience to their leaders, which was a taboo in ancient customs, became a moral quality that found substantial support in the teachings of the missionaries. Like ancient taboos, the new religion taught that Samoan leaders were chosen by the gods, not by men; so Christianity simply took advantage of the divine aspects of Samoan leadership. This divine attribute called for obedience. Disobedience meant the consequences could be tragic.

These qualities of the Samoan chiefs presented no problem to the missionaries. The missionaries simply transferred the allegiance of Samoa to the Christian's God, and they were

wise enough to begin with the chiefs. When the chiefs were converted, naturally the people had to follow.

B. Pastor-Chief Relationship

The new world of Christianity made a powerful impact in Samoa. For a culture that was totally oral and practical, Christianity became, at first, revolutionary. Today, after 150 years, it is very unfortunate that Christianity has become very static and customary. The uniqueness of the Christian gospel is now clothed in institutional policies. The vitality of the Christian gospel is lost in an old cultural "wineskin."

Part of this institutional clothing is the central Samoan conception of religion, which affirms the authority of the pastor over the congregation, and the matai over his household. It is the affirmation of the power of the matai over his household that has help to associate the new religion with the old social structure, but even the authority of the pastor is essentially based on the understanding of the old social structure whereby fear and awe dominate the relationship.

In the missionary days, many local congregations were placed under the charge of Samoan teachers. Since these teachers were wholly dependent on their congregations for material support, the traditional authority of the village became highly respected by the village church. The Samoan Christian

teacher became peculiarly sensitive to traditional authority: a decision of the village fono⁸ could not be ignored; the opinion of a matai had to be treated with respect appropriate to his social position. In the earlier years, the missionary tried to control the consequences of this situation by assuming a quasi-episcopal authority themselves, by not ordaining the Samoan teachers and by not permitting them to serve the sacraments.

The threat to the authority of the old social leaders in the village caused them to demand a change in the policy established by the missionaries. Like Samoan orators, the teachers also devoted themselves to the enhancement of their status. The missionaries were seldom consulted by individual teachers about their local problems. Consequently, the structure of the church began to gain a distinctively Samoan character.

Moreover, many of the chiefs in the village hierarchy were students in the college that trained Samoans for the ministry. Some of them were expelled from the college, others were called by the family to succeed the chief who had passed away, and others never returned to complete their training. These chiefs became very influential in setting the policies of the village church. Oftentimes they were able to persuade the pastor to their opinions. This resulted in the continuance

⁸fono: Samoan word for council or meeting.

of indigenous beliefs and practices despite the so-called success of missionary work. The political authority of the chiefs was easily recognized in church affairs. This pattern is very common today in just about every Samoan village church and continues to be recognized in many local churches in America.

In matters of practice, the chiefs adopted with enthusiasm the public forms of churchmanship. This went well with the Samoan quality of recognition. Samoans attended services regularly, wore the clothes that missionaries thought suitable for such occasions. Their oratorical skills were influential in fund raising; their speeches in secular affairs were full of pious phrases and Biblical allusions. These elements of the Christian faith found favor with the elaborate formalism of Samoan custom. On the other hand, the spiritual life of prayer and study and individual responsibility before God has failed to penetrate Samoan habits.

The Samoan Church, both in Samoan and overseas, recognizes the authority of pastor and chief. This recognition is seen more as an expedient in profitable management in a local church setting, but not necessarily as an indication of Christianity, which demands righteousness in all relationships. The authority of the chief includes the totality of Samoan life, which is political by nature. For the sake of expediency, the Christian's God was simply accepted as the source of this authority. The righteousness that God requires in all

demonstrations of authority was never established by the mission in the days of the missionaries. The chiefs continued to exercise their political maneuvers, manipulating people to their own advantage. Only the more obvious heathen practices were rejected by the missionaries; so the village hierarchy of chiefs, established in the period of wars and heathenism, continued to be the ruling class even in the days of the missionaries. In other words, Christianity never changed the status quo in Samoa. The status quo was simply given a Christian flavor. But the root and origin of the existing status quo was totally unChristian.

Originally, the chiefs were political, spiritual and religious leaders of Samoa. Their religious authority was never in the nature of spirituality, but always political. Christianity, however, gave it the spiritual quality it lacked. So the chiefs naturally equated their authority with that of the Christian ministers, who began his ministry as a Christian teacher in the village, usurping powers already held by the socio-political authorities established in the pre-missionary days.

For the chiefs, the arena of authority was the whole village, and that included the church of the new religion. For the higher chiefs, authority extended to the county, and included all of Samoa; so the new authority of the Christian pastor was only a nominal one. That is why the heavenly quality, an invisible quality, became the only arena for the

pastor's authority. The pastor's arena was never really accepted in Samoan culture; so the sociol-political order was never disturbed by the new religion. Indeed, the new religion was simply added to the old order, and because of its invisible emphasis, the status quo was never touched. The new authority is an other-worldly kind of authority. It has nothing to do with the political arena of the village social structure. The chief continues to function as the sole authority in the village. The pastor, though living in the village, is actually a heavenly authority, a heavenly blessing. He has no real part in the social political affairs of the village. It is like part of a fairly-tale. He exists in the other world. The pastor is not part of the social order, he belongs to the heavenly order, he teaches only heavenly things.

But as the Church progressed, problems arose. Practical matters had to be settled. Policies of institutions required decisions, and the relationship of pastor to the chiefs became a power struggle. It was a struggle to determine who has the final word in human behavior. The life of the chiefs revealed unethical and unChristian behaviors, and the teaching and preaching of the pastor directly involved the authority of the chiefs.

Does the pastor have the authority to expell the highest chief of the village from the position of deacon? If it becomes a congregational matter, how much weight does the

congregation give to the pastor's recommendation to expell the chief? Should the chief be disciplined like other church members? Where is the line between village authority, represented by the chiefs, and the Church authority, represented by the pastor?

It is from this power struggle that a dualistic theology emerged in Samoan Christianity. Dualistic elements in Christian teachings and the Bible also helped to strengthen this position. The consensus of opinion was that the work of the minister is only the spiritual side, while other village social-political matters belong entirely to the chiefs. So the image of the minister as the spiritual leader is recognized, but never as community leader.

Even the theology that the missionaries preached strengthened dualistic elements. In addition, Christian concepts were merely fitted into Samoan customs and images. There was no real confrontation between Christian concepts and Samoan traditional images that brought about an understanding of God and religion. Christianity was simply accepted as part of Samoan indigenous beliefs.

Anthropologist Lowell Holmes puts the matter this way,

Samoans, like many people of the non-Western world seem capable of compartmentalizing Christian and indigenous beliefs so that what appear to be contradictions in the two systems do not seem to cause any anxiety or conflict. Although nearly all modern Samoans identify as Christians,

there is still widespread knowledge of indigenous mythology and spirit lore.⁹

Felix Keesing quotes a statement by a missionary,

I am afraid from the Christian viewpoint the missions have been rather a failure in Samoa. Instead of accepting Christianity and allowing it to remold their lives to its form, the Samoans have fitted them inside Samoan custom, making them a part of the native culture.¹⁰

This has been a phenomenon for many cultures that have been touched by Christianity. It is the custom to "swallow up" or reinterpret a foreign theology so that it meets the needs of a particular society. Christianity is a Middle Eastern religion that has spread throughout the world.

C. Theological Issues

The previous sections have dealt with the heart of Christianity in Samoa, especially its beginning. But as Samoans have migrated overseas, especially to the United States, the issues raised have become even more critical. The new environment has brought a damaging blow to the old religion, namely Christianity, in Samoa. Theological issues have become very depressing to the faith of the Samoans in a different environment. The harmony and simple acceptance of Christianity by their forefathers in Samoa have become complex and profound theological issues in their new and different

⁹Holmes, p. 67.

¹⁰Ibid, pp. 67-68.

homeland. Theological questions never before raised, have become critical factors in their immigrant experience. Their identity as Samoan Christians in America depends on how they respond to these theological issues.

On top of these theological issues is that of the pastor. I have already touched on the spiritual image of the Samoan minister. This image directly conflicts with the social concerns of the Samoan immigrant in the United States, which call for a new kind of religious leader. A social kind of community leader appears to be relevant, or, more important, the emphasis and concerns of the Church must be redirected to meet the people's social needs. The traditional role of the minister is challenged by the new environment, for this environment brings new problems and poses new issues.

In Samoa, the minister is never considered as a community leader. The pastor's work is limited to spiritual concerns per se. There is a sharp and distinct line drawn between the social-political matters and those of spirituality. Even the chiefs encourage this distinction, since their political power and influence can be threatened by the minister's authority. Part of the cause of this distinction is a misunderstanding of the meaning of spirituality.

Ironically, it was really Samoan traditions and customs that drew this line. For since Samoa had always been politically-minded, Christianity was never really able to

remold and refashion Samoan culture, it was simply added to faaSamoa (Samoan way of life).

It must be understood that before the arrival of Christianity in Samoa, people's lives were ruled largely by fear. This pagan fear was simply transferred to a new object, namely, the Christian God.

The indigenous belief in all of Polynesia was animism, and the practice of animism was determined largely by fear. So today, the churches are governed more by fear than by love. Ministers of the older generation are more concerned with enforcing conformity to certain laws of behavior than with showing their love for God by loving and forgiving others.

This pagan fear partly explains the sacredness of the pulpit, of the church building, and the sacred and spiritual image of the minister. The majority of Samoan churches in the United States have placed priority on building large and expansive church facilities at the cost of economic pain and grief for people in lower income brackets.

What has really happened in Samoan Christianity is that the Christian gospel of love and freedom is put into an old cultural wineskin of animism, and the old Samoan world of the spirit continues to dominate Christianity among the Samoan people.

This is perhaps the greatest difficulty facing the newer generation of ministers in the Samoan Church. We are

up against a traditional and indigenous kind of theology. Dualistic thinking no longer works, especially for the Samoan immigrants; it is bringing more pain to the people. It deprives them of their God-given humanity, and that is why the Samoan Church overseas has failed to meet the social needs of the Samoan immigrants. The author, therefore, proposes to reflect seriously on the beginning of Christianity in Samoa. We have to go back to the period of the missionaries and begin the theological process from that period, critical to the Samoan people. Otherwise, it will be very difficult to make our people hear and understand the Christian gospel of love and freedom.

In other words, a heathen understanding of priestly work has to be corrected. At the beginning of Christianity in Samoa, the old heathen fear was never replaced by Christian love, but the people transferred their fear to a new object and began to fear God with a pagan fear.

This transference from one religion to another was made possible in a homogeneous society based on authority. The new Samoan ministers found it to their advantage to be feared by the people.

So Christian legalism replaced traditional taboos. The lives of the people continued to be controlled to suit a particular ideal and pattern in order to fulfill certain programs in the name of the new God. Fear became the motivating force and power in accepting the new faith.

This is the root of Christianity in Samoa that must be burned and destroyed. It is here that a great contribution of the Samoan immigrants to the mother Church may at least begin. The new and different experience of the Samoan immigrants can challenge the mother Church, for it is out of their unique experience that the irrelevance of the missionary theology is comprehended. The immigrant experience calls for a radical reversal of the old world in Samoa. It has to be God's way of judgement upon the mother Church. It is Reformation in the History of the Samoan Church.

And in a society that has developed oratory as its highest art, the minister is placed in a most valuable position of direction and leadership. The minister's influence can bring theology into clear and proper focus. It can insure the future of Christianity for the Samoan people. The rhetorical skills and style of the sermon, the highlight of a Sunday morning service, can be very persuasive and convincing in the people's lives. The minister, aware of a new theology, can start the new trend toward making our people understand and appreciate the love and freedom of the Christian Gospel.

In this respect, I see the prophetic ministry as most significant in reforming and remolding Samoan Christianity. The ministry of preaching can be most effective in this context, but the effectiveness must be constantly watched by the new generation of ministers. The strength of the Samoan cul-

ture, the art of oratory, must be utilised effectively in the art of Christian preaching.

While the challenge and work will be very unpopular, as in all prophetic undertakings, especially in view of the present status quo which favors the leadership of the older generation of ministers and chiefs, and while opposition may also come from the younger generation of ministers who are not aware of the problem as the author sees it, we do have the Christ of the New Testament to guide and comfort us.

John Cobb has clarified this New Testament Christ for me:

The New Testament Christ does not embody a system of values. The New Testament does not offer an ethical code, Christ is a reality in terms of which one is called and empowered to act responsibly...but the need is to discern the call of Christ in each particular situation... That is not decided by appeal to any established principle. It is to be determined in openness to the meaning of Christ for that situation. 11

Cobb stresses that Christ has his own meaning. So everything is relativized, and Christ frees the believer to live toward the future, "rather than attempting to defend, repeat, or destroy the past...."12

Cobb's clarification of the New Testament Christ is most relevant for the Samoan context. At this point, however, the author finds Process Theology, at best, no more than suggestive. A great deal more reflective thought, as well as

¹¹John B. Cobb, Jr., Christ In A Pluralistic Age (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 59.

¹²Ibid, p. 59.

relevant study, is necessary for the full development of such perspectives. Thus, in attempting a theology of Samoan immigrants in the United States, the author is fully convinced that Incarnational Theology, especially that of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, will provide the proper impact.

CHAPTER 3

EXPERIENCE OF SAMOAN IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA

I. SOME BASIC SOCIAL CONCERNS

A. Family

When the United States Navy withdrew from American Samoa in 1951, serious problems prevailed. The annual civilian payroll of \$282,000 was gone, too. So economics was the "primary reason for 1500 Samoans who emigrated to the United States in 1952."¹

Arriving in America, Samoans quickly established themselves in Hawaii and California. But the effort to live as permanent residents brought about many problems, probably common to all immigrants.

The crux of the matter is that all Samoans are products of a communal system with built-in securities. Under that system, the family is the most important unit, and the individual must design his/her own wants and needs in the light of the importance of the family. So the basic problem for the Samoans in America today is that being products of the communal system, we now find ourselves in a highly competitive economic system: a system which is foreign to us: a system which brings to us at times a hostile environment.

¹Holmes, p. 105.

This is the key problem for many Samoan immigrants today. How can we cope? How can we meet this ambivalence that we have to experience in order to "belong" in this kind of society?

To understand this communal system, it is important to look at the structure of the family in Samoa. The basic unit of social organization in Samoa is the family, and the family in Samoa is not the same thing as in America.

The most important units of social organization in Samoa are the household (fua'ifale), the extended family Aiga potopoto), and the village (nu'u). The term Aiga (g is pronounced "ng" like angry) has been translated into English as "extended family," "family group," "patriarchy," or "clan."

An Aiga consists of a group of people related by blood, marriage, or adoption, varying in number from a few to upwards of 200, which acknowledges a common allegiance to a particular "matai" (chief).²

Each Aiga is headed by a chief (matai), and the chief represents the culmination of the lineage structure of "kinship and locality."³ As in Polynesia generally, ties of kinship and locality are the basis of political organization in

²Gray, p. 20. Both Gray and Davidson give a detailed analysis of the meaning, function, and responsibilities of the chiefs and the extended family.

³J.W. Davidson, Samoa Mo Samoa (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 16.

Samoa.⁴ So the chief means both status and "title" to an individual, and is more important to a family. Hence, according to the Government of American Samoa,

Samoa is still a land where status is more important than material possessions and the only Polynesian culture where the title is more important than the person.⁵

It follows that "the basic territorial unit of political as of economic, organization was the nu'u (village)."⁶

According to J.W. Davidson, each village as defined by a "highly formalized greeting of its principal matai (chief)," called faalupega.⁷ This highly formalized greeting became the social form of recognition and identification of social status. The faalupega also contained the village's history, and became the constitution of the village council meeting, "fono." This fono consists of all of the chiefs from all individual families in the village.

The appropriate faalupega were recited on all formal occasions, such as meetings of the fono or the reception of guests from another village; and it was the pride and duty of the orators to know them for the whole of Samoa.⁸

This fono was the focal point of village life. It was held in the village "malae," the courtyard of the village's high chief. This "malae" or courtyard, became like a capital

⁴Ibid.

⁵American Samoa Office of Tourism, Pamphlet, 1977.

⁶Davidson, p. 16. ⁷Ibid, p. 17.

⁸Ibid, p. 17.

of a village. It is here that the chiefs met to "decide issues of morality and to determine civil and military courses of action."⁹

Within such social structure, there is no such thing as individualism. Beginning with the family, to the village, county, and the whole of Samoa, a person's total life is only a microcosm of the whole. It is by nature a corporate kind of community. Every person is a real social part of the family, village, county, and the whole of Samoa. From the moment of birth, an individual's life has been determined by the social structures and communal way of life. Many Samoans see this as very similar to the Biblical Hebrews.

Every Samoan has a family, an Aiga, and all Samoan aiga are very large. It is very typical for every Samoan to be able to trace his/her relationship to a dozen or more Aiga. This ability makes one aware of personal status, because the Aiga actually means status to an individual. So it is very important for practically all Samoans to be knowledgeable in genealogical matters.

Within this customary extended family lies a supportive system whereby the chief becomes responsible for shelter and support for any kin who may be in such need. In addition, opensided houses allow relatives to sleep side by side on mats, and newcomers can immediately assist with the work of

⁹Holmes, p. 59.

the family plantation. This is very typical of Polynesian life.

For many Samoans, large households are a natural consequence of the living arrangements of the extended family, although it is often difficult to find sufficient space for such large families in Hawaii. Insufficient space is an essentially acute problem for recent immigrants.... 10

The extended family, being the basic unit of organization in Samoa, brings about a very serious problem for the Samoan immigrant in America, namely, the housing problem.

In Hawaii, two studies conducted on Samoan and Filipino immigrants indicated that housing was their most serious problem.¹¹

In 1971, the Oahu Samoan Survey showed an average (mean) Samoan household size of 10.4 persons, in which the household usually included members of the extended family.¹²

Adele Satele and Ramsay Shu made a study of the Samoan community in Southern California, 410 households were surveyed, and the average size of these 410 household was six. "These households range in size from one member to over twelve, but most (76%) have three to eight members."¹³ This

¹⁰The Immigration Study (Honolulu: Office of Human Resources, 1974), pp. 37-38.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ramsay Shu and Adele S. Satele, The Samoan Community In Southern California: Conditions and Needs (Chicago: Asian American Mental Health Research Center, 1977), p. 33.

has been the most recent study of the Samoan immigrants in America.

Between the years 1968 to 1970, Joan Ablon surveyed 75 Samoan households scattered throughout the West Coast, and found that all had at least one extended family member living in the home.¹⁴

Ablon also concluded that the average Samoan household numbers from 6 to 10, and it was very common for relatives to come and go, so "household composition was very fluid."¹⁵

It is also important to keep in mind that the extended family member changes constantly. "Among the people interviewed 18 expected new members in the near future, and 10 departures were imminent. When new kin appear seeking shelter, a Kilihi family head in Honolulu finds himself in a very difficult position. Either he is forced to refuse them which causes a serious reflection on family loyalty, or he is forced to break housing regulations."¹⁶

The Immigration Study in Honolulu recommends as follows,

A program aimed at alleviating some of the housing problems of Samoan immigrants should seek an accommodation between the extended family unit and the institutional and legal requirements of Hawaii. 17

¹⁴Emma Gee, (ed.) Counterpoint (Los Angeles: Asian American Studies Center, University of California, 1976), p. 403.

¹⁵Ibid. ¹⁶The Immigration Study, p. 39. ¹⁷Ibid.

Evidently, both Hawaii's and California's housing policies do not fit the Polynesian way of living. While the extended family system is not against the law, it does, however, violate many State, Federal, and City and County regulations. The Immigration Study in Hawaii, therefore, recommends that "perhaps the regulations should be reexamined."¹⁸

In 1965, the Samoan Congregational Christian Church In Hawaii, at Nanakuli, Oahu, purchased 1.3 acres of land and built their Church and 10 small frame houses for some of its families. It is called the Samoan Church Village at Nanakuli.

The privacy of the community allowed the families to practice the extended family system and traditional Samoan ceremonial practices continued under the supervision of the minister and a Board of Directors. Ala'ilima & Ala'ilima made a study of this unique Samoan Church Village in Hawaii and came up with these advantages:

1. Parents can raise their children "in a Samoan way," faaaloalo (respectful & courteous conduct).
2. Corporal punishment, as the common and accepted form of discipline for children made possible.
3. Intimate acquaintance and mutual interdependence.
4. The Village Council handles its own disciplinary problems, and thus lessens the work of the local police force.

The result of the Ala'ilima & Ala'ilima study was a highly recommended form of Samoan community based on this Church

¹⁸Ibid.

Village at Nanakuli in Hawaii. Both the study and recommendations were submitted to the Office of the Governor, but nothing was done.¹⁹

But the Ala'ilima Study also noted that not all Samoans agree on the establishment of a Samoan community. These Samoans have successfully established themselves here, and rely more on Western-style securities such as good skilled jobs, income and savings, than on the traditional Samoan arrangement. There are also many Samoans who find the extended family custom burdensome in America. Tensions exists among the matais (chiefs) themselves, especially in terms of community representation for the total Samoan community. In its relationship to government agencies, the unity of the leadership of the Samoan community has not been successful. But the writer firmly believes that this weakness in the Samoan community is very minor, for the Samoan Government back home can be used as a resource to solve this problem.

Nevertheless, the recent Samoan immigrants would prefer the extended family organization in America. The initial adjustment period is very critical and very painful, and so the Immigration Study continues as follow:

When such a preference (extended family unit) is indicated, housing regulations might be modified to allow for extended family living arrangements during an initial

¹⁹Ibid, p. 41.

adjustment period. This would utilize the extended family as a transitional structure to help prevent early problems of intercultural adjustment. 20

Within the last 10 years, however, as Samoans have participated in the social mobility of the American economy, a very significant trend has emerged in the Samoan community. Samoans have managed economically to purchase homes of their own. For the Samoans, owning their own homes has brought many advantages. Ownership is an indication of social mobility for Samoans, and also makes practical the extended family custom which has been restricted in public housing.

In our Church, The First Samoan Congregational Church In Harbor City, U.C.C., half of the 45 families own their own homes. Ten of these 22 families have purchased their homes within the last ten years. The 23 families who pay rent are also saving money to purchase their own homes in due time.

Owning a home alleviates a lot of housing problems which large Samoan households usually experience. But the practice of the extended family in their private homes continues. The survey by Shu and Satele concluded that "Samoans welcome their relatives living with them...it is also a matter of economic necessity...that relatives live together than separately."²¹

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Shu and Satele, p. 33.

Finally, the Samoan extended family offers a cooperative and supportive security for newly arrived immigrants. The relatives who have managed to establish themselves in American society feel obligated and responsible for the newly arrived immigrants. This cooperative aspect may discourage the competitive spirit of American society. The spirit of determination and the quest for success are taken over by the cooperative and supportive securities of the extended family, and it may take sometime before the newly arrived immigrants can adjust to the competitiveness of American society.

B. Employment

Employment has been reported to be a serious problem by a substantial number of recent immigrants. Since his/her resources are limited, the new permanent resident must quickly find a job in order to support himself/herself or family in the States, as well as relatives left behind.

The Immigration Study done in Honolulu, conducted by the Mayor's Office, City & County of Honolulu, in 1974, reports several data confirming employment as a major problem for the Samoan immigrants.

Studies of Samoans in Hawaii conducted in the mid-1960s indicated that Samoans were predominately employed as "blue-collar" workers with few in business or professional occupations.

In Nanakuli, Oahu, Yost (1965) found the most frequently reported occupation for Samoan men to be that of laborer, particularly in construction work. The women were predominantly employed as laundry workers and waitresses. Six Samoans who had been teachers in Samoa had changed their occupation because they did not meet Hawaii certification requirements.

The Ala'ilima Study also reported very low wages for many Samoan families. Joan Ablon, who conducted a study of the Samoan community on the West Coast, makes the following observation,

Samoans work in a great variety of occupations....The majority of men work in the local shipyards or in heavy industry....Some Samoans work in shipping and receiving areas or at ticket counters of the nearby international airport.... 22

Ablon's survey, conducted between 1968 and 1970, reports Samoans to be working in more respectable jobs. Civil Service workers, bank tellers, X-ray or laboratory technicians are among the workers identified.

The comparison of these reports indicated a gradual rise in employment opportunities for the Samoan immigrants, and a gradual rise in respectable jobs. It is quite evident that social mobility also exists among the Samoan community.

But the long and difficult road of "belonging" that the immigrants must travel is not so smooth as it seems.

²²Gee, pp. 410-411.

For the first generation of Samoan immigrants in the United States, employment was a major problem. Culturally, Samoans are not accustomed to the so-called Protestant ethic which gave rise to the American ideal of working and earning a good day's living.

Work in Samoa is a cooperative affair and people toil together in family groups, or special association units such as the Aualuma, the Aumaga, or the Women's Committee, or in a group involving the total village. Fruits of men's and women's labor are shared freely without regard to the measure of individual input. The industrious and lazy alike enjoy adequate food, clothing, and shelter, but there is pride and prestige for those who do their share and more. For the young untitled male, efficient and conscientious labor is a way of distinguishing himself as a promising candidate for some future family matai title. For the Samoan immigrant to the United States, however, the ambition for a matai title becomes a financial handicap.

The traditional customs of the matais, which constantly claim both time and resources, conflict with the concept of employment in America. The matai system is irrelevant to factory jobs and urban living in California. Upon the death of even a distant relative within the extended family, the chief stays away from work until all customary and traditional formalities are completed. This is also true of other special occasions such as weddings, church dedications, or flag ac-

tivities in San Francisco and Honolulu.

These customary formalities which require the presence of the chiefs include financial preparations among the extended family, acceptance and recognition of relatives visiting the family of the deceased to pay homage in the form of financial aid and the exchanged of Samoan traditional fine mats, or taking-part in wedding formalities. These proceedings require all the chief's ability. Oratorical speeches and recognition of family ties are the responsibilities of the chiefs. Again, in religious matters the chief is the proper person to confront the minister and the church involved. The chief is in charge of all formal arrangements and is solely responsible for speaking to the minister and churches on behalf of the deceased and family, or families. All of these customary proceedings take 4 to 5 days, which is about 3 working days for a chief, since the occasions usually take place during the weekends.

Joan Ablon made this observation of the role of the matai in a study of Samoans in California:

The powers and prerogatives of the matais are most frequently recognized at certain circumscribed life cycle occasions, such as weddings or funerals, where they take care of business matters and serve as family spokesmen. 23

But in America, modifications of the chief's role seem quite evident among a large segment of the Samoan community,

²³Gee, p. 404.

especially among the Samoans who have been living here for a much longer period. So Ablon continues,

Some changes in protocol concerning chiefly prerogatives have occurred in the absence of traditional controls imposed by the structure hierarchy in the islands and by a genuine shortage of matais. Matais who reside in the area are accorded special respect, and visiting matais may be honored during presence here. Nonetheless, the feeling now widely exists that a family which works hard and lives well can "make it on their own" socially and economically, without a family title or titleholder. 24

Offsetting this cultural modification of the chief's role is the growing number of churches. Since many of these churches have old pastors from Samoa, the old order is restored.

While many Samoans long for the basic freedom to strive for social and economic mobility, the local churches find it to their advantage to carry on the Samoan social hierarchy which benefits the chiefs in a local church and helps the minister in some ways. I will say more about this issue in the second part of this chapter. There is a large segment of the Samoan community, especially the older chiefs and ministers, which favors to continuing the traditional role of the chief.

But a study of Samoans in California reveals the following observation,

While the social hierarchy has thus faded in significance, the extended family has remained a thoroughly viable unitThe Aiga has evolved in relationship to the practical

²⁴Ibid.

needs of California living and become something of a mutual aid and employment agency, cushioning the cultural shock for arriving relatives, seeking jobs....²⁵

So the extended family continues to function as a important resource of employment for the Samoan immigrants. Established relatives in the States feel deeply obligated to the newly arrived relatives. The extended family remains cohesive, and comprehensive, and incorporates a wide range of kinsfolk. The Holland Study concludes,

The gravitation of Samoan men into ship-building, metal-jobbing and construction work and of women nursing thus reflects more than chance or even prior experience at Pago Pago or Pearl Harbor, and these strong patterns to family and community guidance also evinced in the characteristics clusterings of Samoan employment...employers have found that if Samoans are summoned away for feasts or funeral...others will willingly assume the extra tasks. ²⁶

²⁵Gordon R. Lewthaite, and others, "From Polynesia to California: Samoan Migration and Its Sequel." Journal of Pacific History, VIII (1973), p. 151.

²⁶Ibid, p. 151.

C. Education

There are no available statistics which would present a comprehensive view of the educational level of recent immigrants. However, several surveys have provided some partial information about certain groups within the immigrant population. For example, the following table shows the educational level of 6,544 Samoans interviewed.

TABLE 1
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF 6,544 SAMOANS

Grades Completed	Number	Percent
0-8	3,050	46.6
High School	593	9.1
Some College	363	5.5
Unknown	2,537	38.8
TOTAL	6,544	100.0

Source: Data are derived from "Report of the State Immigration Service Center." Commission on Manpower and Full Employment, State of Hawaii, 1972.

The data from this table suggest that the educational level of the Samoan population in Hawaii is somewhat low, with very few college graduates and perhaps considerably less than 50% high school graduates. The lack of a high school education would be extremely likely in view of the fact that the first public high school of American Samoa only began in

1946. Unfortunately, the survey had several short-comings which prevent making conclusive statements about recent Samoan immigrants. For example, difficulties in interpretation occur when we consider such problems as a) 39% "unknown responses," b) lack of information about recent immigrants vs. long-term immigrants, and c) possible inaccuracy of the reported data.

In spite of the possible biasing influences on the educational data of recent immigrants, the available evidence suggests that among recently arrived immigrants the Samoans average fewer years of formal education than Filipinos. It is reasonable to expect other immigrant groups to show average differences in educational level. For example: Japanese, Chinese, and Korean immigrants may differ significantly from Samoans and Filipinos.

In 1966, Ala'ilima conducted a survey of 43 Samoan families in Kalihi Valley Housing Project, Oahu, and found that 28 of the families reported that the education of their children was their reason for immigrating to Hawaii. Ala'ilima also noted that the parents had high ambitions for their children, although they had done relatively little concrete planning to ensure that the ambitions were implemented. The major parental complaint, according to the Ala'ilima study, was a lack of supervision in and around the schools. Other problems mentioned were that the children lacked a quiet place to study and that the parents were limited in the degree

of academic assistance that they could provide to their children.

Yost reported in her study (1965), that many Samoans desired to have their children educated in Hawaii so that the children would learn to speak English fluently. Yost concluded that her results suggested that Samoan parents believe that economic and social advancement, in both Samoa and Hawaii, results from being proficient in English. This report exactly agrees with my experience as a Samoan immigrant.

The most recent survey on the education of the Samoan community was conducted by Ramsay Shu and Adele Satele in 1977. They surveyed the Samoan community in the South Bay area of Southern California and came up with the following data:

TABLE 2

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

Q: IN GENERAL, SOME PEOPLE HAVE MORE EDUCATION,
AND SOME PEOPLE HAVE LESS. CAN YOU TELL ME
HOW MUCH EDUCATION HE/SHE HAS?

Category Label	Code	Count	Pct of Responses	Pct of Cases
No Formal Education	1	59	3.0	14.4
Pastor's Village School	2	76	3.8	18.5
Some Grade School	3	536	27.1	130.7
Finished Grade School	4	215	10.9	52.4
Some High School	5	397	20.1	96.8
High School Diploma	6	506	25.6	123.4
Trade School	7	59	3.0	14.4
A.A. Degree	8	66	3.3	16.1
College Degree	9	55	2.8	13.4
Graduate School	10	<u>6</u>	<u>0.3</u>	<u>1.5</u>
Total Responses		1975	100.0	418.7

0 Missing Cases 410 Valid Cases²⁷

²⁷Shu and Satele, p. 68.

Table 2 shows a constant improvement of the educational level of Samoan immigrants. While the Samoans never looked at education as a major problem, it is encouraging that the educational level of the Samoan immigrants continues to rise. Part of the improvement is that there now exists in American Samoa three high schools and one Junior College.

Many Samoan students are given the opportunity to seek formal education. Today there are 5 Samoans playing regularly in professional football, and all of them were drafted from major colleges and universities in America.

These data point out a constant trend of improvement in formal education of the Samoan community. During the years I have worked in the parish there have been high school and some college graduates every year. The future looks very bright for the Samoan community.

It is quite evident that second and third generations of Samoans have succeeded because of the struggles and patience of the Samoans who came before them. While the first generations began from the bottom, the succeeding generations have managed to complete their high school and college educations. Many educated Samoan students have returned to Samoa and are now contributing to the social and economic improvements of Samoa. But it still remains for the Samoan Church in America to play a more active role in the education of their young people. The clergy and the

Samoan Church in America must continue to inspire their youth to make full use of their education to serve the needs and fulfill the hopes and dreams of the Samoan immigrants. The Church plays a very influential role in the education of the Samoan immigrant because the Church continues to be a very significant part of life in America. This is a successful model that the Samoans must learn from other immigrant groups who have done well in America.

CHAPTER 3

II. THE DOMINANT TRAITS IN THEIR LIFESTYLES
IN THE UNITED STATESA. The Samoan Christian Emphasis

Christianity in Samoa is significantly and ultimately expressed in what is traditionally known as spiritualism. It is that kind of spiritualism that is dualistic in nature. The definition of spiritualism given by the Encyclopedia Britannica partly expresses the most popular form of Christianity in Samoa.

(spiritualism is a) name which signify a philosophic attitude or point of view about the universe opposed to a materialistic philosophy and to imply that the ultimate reality is more fundamentally on the mental side of things rather than on that which appeals most directly to the sense as the behavior and modifications of matter. 28

Harry Price, a well-known investigator of spiritualism notes that "Spiritualism is, at its best, a religion; at its worst, a racket."²⁹

To understand this phenomenon it is important to go back to Samoa before 1830 when Christianity was officially introduced into Samoa. Samoa had no "national" religion. But Samoans had always believed in supernatural beings, and

²⁸Simeon Edmunds, Spiritualism, (London: Aquarian Press, 1966), p. 1.

²⁹Ibid, p. 2.

there was a pantheon of warlike gods. Many of these warlike gods were personified by birds, animals, trees, rocks, and even people who excelled in battles. Even the myths and oral history of Samoa are told in personifications of an ancestral cult.³⁰ A strong concept of spirits, or ghosts, prevailed in this religion. The antropologist Lowell D. Holmes relates the following observation:

The Samoans had a concept of spirits, or ghosts, which they called aitu, but they did not see this as incompatible with a religious philosophy which stressed a spiritual life after death.³¹

Holmes goes on to say that Samoans had believed in an immortal soul even before the coming of Christianity. This immortal soul (agaga) left the body at the time of death and journeyed either to Pulotu, the "abode of the blessed," or to Fafa, the Samoan Hades.³² When Christianity arrived, the Samoans quickly conceptualized these indigenous beliefs as identical with Christian concepts of the after-life, heaven, and hell. In addition, the missionaries' rejection of Samoan culture and the emphasis on the Christian eternal life brought Samoan indigenous beliefs into the universal lime-light, and so throughout the 150 years of Christianity in Samoa, dualism has prevailed.

³⁰G.S. Parsonson, "The Literate Revolution in Polynesia." Journal of Pacific History, Volume II (1967), p. 43.

³¹Holmes, p. 59.

³²Ibid, p. 65.

Christianity in Samoa is dualistic in nature. The spirit is elevated and praised over against the body. Spiritual values and qualities have always been emphasized as the ideal and best of Christian life, while physical and bodily things have been considered secondary in nature, particularly in one's pilgrimage through the ideal religious life.

In fact, to be religious is to be spiritual. To be non-religious is to be physical. The physical world never lasts permanently, but is always changing. All people shall eventually die. Thus, the physical world is only a temporal life. Why strive for that which is only temporal and always changing? Why not strive for that which has permanent value, and never changes, namely, the spiritual life?

Moreover, since God is spirit, then it is only in the spirit that one meets God. To get the spirit in harmony with God, it is best to negate all physical and bodily desires. The more one cultivates the spiritual life, over against bodily desires, the more Godly one becomes. Worldly and bodily pleasures comprise the chief temptations and obstacles to the ideal Christian life. Spiritual aspiration, therefore, is the whole business of Christianity. To be a Christian is to be spiritual. This is exactly the kind of theology that I was brought up on, back in Samoa. This is the case with all Samoan immigrants.

We were taught a kind of Christianity which is fundamental and represents a very literal understanding of Scriptures. Today, the Samoan Church is guided more by traditions than by the teachings of Scriptures. What is worse still, this is the Christianity that has molded and shaped the attitudes and values of the Samoan people for the last 150 years, ever since Christianity was introduced there. It has been a very powerful influence because it is the center of all life in Samoa.

This superficial, traditional, authoritative, and simplistic kind of Christianity has blended in well with a cultural that is practical in total outlook. Outward appearances and recognition are some of her most important values. It is a lifestyle of formality and dignity. While it does help to bring order and good conduct among the people, it fails to deal with basic human needs. It is great in upholding the value and dignity of human relationships, but it fails to go deep enough, it has not reached the levels of human experience where it really counts. This mode of Christianity does not fulfill the needs of the Samoan immigrants.

The experience of the Samoan immigrants has become a vital challenge to the religious leaders of the Samoan community in the United States. The relevancy of the old theology is being challenged, for the old theology no longer works in the immigrant experience. Generally, the religious leaders have not responded well. So the people have opted for Samoan

traditions and cultures. That is why the extended family has been revitalized in America.

For the future of Samoan Christianity, however, the religious leaders must respond immediately. Thus, it is the objective of this project to look at Samoan Christianity in a new theological key. A relevant theology for the Samoan immigrants may well be the future of Christianity in Samoa and abroad. This may be our greatest contribution to the mother Church in Samoa, and to the American scene.

B. The Cultural Emphasis

I have already made reference to some very important cultural traits of the Samoan people. The extended family has emerged as the most vital social unit for the Samoan immigrants in the United States. The Samoans' lifestyle in American communities and the ways they confront some very basic social concerns continue to validate the importance of the extended family. The initial stage of cultural re-adjustment is profoundly dependent on the accessibility of the extended family. In the sections dealing with some basic social issues such as housing, employment, and education, I have pointed out the significance of the extended family. Moreover, Gordon Lewthwaite, Christiane Mainzer, Patrick Holland, and Joan Ablon conducted studies in California Samoan communities and came up with this observation:

At least initially Samoans tended to cluster together in similar residential complexes, and serve in the forces together, and contacts were later maintained as they searched out employment and housing for each other. 33

This mutual dependency provided cohesion for the Samoan immigrants in a different land. But it also meant the solidarity of the Samoan immigrants from the outside world. This sense of Samoan solidarity found further expression and reinforcement in a revitalized church life. For, as Ablon well stated, "the churches quickly became the centers of Samoan life...the perpetuators of faaSamoa."34

The irony of the matter is that resentment of the matai system (the heart of the faaSamoa) was one factor that led to emigration. There was also a very strong reaction against wealth sharing and against regular church attendance. These were some of the negative feelings which Mainzer and Holland observed that caused some Samoans to leave the islands. Life in the States, in turn, required dependency on the traditional extended family.

Evidently, what has really emerged in the plight of the Samoan immigrants to the United States is the very strong conservative bent of a unique social structure. Since the most important unit of social organization in Samoa is the extended family, it follows that despite a different

³³Gordon R. Lewthwaite, and others, Ibid. pp. 133ff.

³⁴Ibid, p. 148.

environment in a different land, the same social-political order becomes a dominant influence in the life of Samoan immigrants.

Lowell D. Holmes writes that most anthropologists who have worked in Samoa have been very impressed with the unusual cultural conservatism of the Samoan people. Holmes goes on to quote from Oxford and Cambridge geographers:

the Samoans are a people with such a conservative nature...that new elements (foreign goods, money, Christianity) have never been allowed to sweep the land with the devastating effects to be observed in some other Pacific island communities. 35

How and why Samoa has managed to retain much of its traditional culture presents an interesting anthropological problem. Why has this island group during the 150 years of European contact been able to retain much of the traditional way of life while other Polynesians have abandoned theirs in favor of the ways of the white people?

Holmes answers this problem by referring to the nature of Samoan culture itself, particularly in regard to its attitudes and institutions relating to the family, governments, and the supernatural. It is a system which allows rewards to a much greater number of people. Samoan society allows wider participation in social, economic, and political affairs to its members. The concept of aristocracy is so broad it actually includes the common person.

³⁵Holmes, p. 93.

Here is a system where chiefs are elected by the extended family. Eligibility to elite positions in the matai system is a real possibility in terms of determination and ambition, but not necessarily to any social biological lineage. Indeed, just about every Samoan can trace a direct relationship to a king or at least to a High Chief. If one "played his cards right, he could someday conceivably be elected to one of these High Chief titles if not to one that had once been a royal title."³⁶

Moreover, Christianity had very little effect on Samoan culture. The acceptance of Christianity had little effect on the status or authority of Chiefs. Samoa had always been politically oriented. The strength of its social structure had always been the village council rather than religious sanctions. Christianity was simply added to Samoan culture primarily for other social advantages. This is a most important historical fact that missionaries failed to realize, and it is the anthropologists and sociologists who have pointed this out. I am also conscious of the fact that many other Samoan ministers may have discovered this point of history, but such discovery has not yet been documented.

Thus, the cultural emphasis has become a much stronger force in the Christian lifestyle of the Samoan immigrants.

³⁶Ibid. p. 95.

This cultural emphasis appears to meet social needs and cultural re-adjustments in a different land. Since the Church continues to be central in their lives, the cultural emphasis has become the motivating force in their religious behavior in the States. Christianity becomes a means to fulfilling their strong cultural bent; their human aspirations and lusts are accomplished in the name of Christianity.

C. The Parish Emphasis

The religious and cultural characteristics of the Samoan people have brought about a unique lifestyle in the United States. The Samoan immigrants come to the United States with their proud religion and a very strong culture awareness. Their experiences in the American communities, especially in the local parishes, pivots around these religious and cultural traits.

As the Samoans continue to establish themselves here and pursue the immigrant quest to "belong" in American society, the cultural and religious ways of Samoa emerge as very strong social forces, even in a different environment like America. While the first generations thought that rejection of the faaSamoa (the Samoan way of life) was the way to success in America, it has become clear that it is not true. In the light of the growth and influence of the extended family in social affairs and the revitalization of the faaSamoa in

the local parish, it is quite evident that the faaSamoa has become a vital social structure for the Samoan immigrants in the United States.

In 1973, Gordon Lewthwaite, and others reported in the Journal of Pacific History that 30 Samoan churches of various denominations had existed in California.³⁷ The Rev. Mila Maefau's Doctor of Ministry project, 1977, records 36 Samoan churches in the South Bay area alone.³⁸ Today, in 1980, this figure has almost doubled. Samoan churches are now found all along the West coast, stretching from Seattle to San Diego. The proliferation of these Samoan churches is primarily the manifestation of the revitalization of Samoan Christianity and culture in immigrant experience.

This traditional Samoan propensity for church-building has found ample scope in California. For the Samoan immigrants, it means the affirmation of their identity as Samoans living in America. It is the answer to their quest for identity, however subtle or unconscious that may happen to be. But rather than being absorbed into the mainstream of American life, Samoans build churches and continue to be

³⁷Lewthwaite, and others, Ibid. p. 153.

³⁸Mila Maefau, Unpublished Doctor of Ministry Theses (Claremont School of Theology, 1977).

active Christians as an affirmation of their identity, a people proud of their heritage and culture.

In the local parish the Samoans fulfill their pride and identity, unashamed of their heritage and physical identifications. It provides the opportunity to relate to other Samoans, to worship God in their own language, to excel in their own cultural ways and the uniqueness of Samoan Christianity.

The local parish also enhances relationships within the extended family. The senior members, or a chief living here, of a particular family traditionally attract other relatives of the extended family to the same church they attend.

The ethnic Samoan church makes possible self-determination and self-esteem, and this is quite hopeful for a people who feel oppressed and inferior in the lower brackets of the economic and social world of the American people. At least, in the Samoan ethnic church, they can do their own thing in a very proud manner. This promotes wholesome self-image and confidence while living in a foreign environment, the dignity to be a real person, and the fulfillment of God-given rights.

On the other hand, many experiences have given a totally different picture of what is happening in the local parishes. Many families have been deprived of the right to a happy and healthy living due to the financial demands of many local churches. The Samoan determination to build large and

expansive church buildings is more of an emotional thing. Their economic and financial handicaps are hardly ever taken into consideration.

In many families, children have not received the proper care and parental guidance. Part of the problem is that the parents spend so much time and energy in church-related activities. Practically all Samoan churches are in the process of paying off mortgages on the land and church facilities they have built. Local Samoan congregations spend much time and energy in fund-raising activities, and hardly any time in for faith and healing ministries. It seems that the ideal successful Christian family is one that takes an active part in all fund-raising programs sponsored by the Church. These activities include dances, luaus, bingo games, monthly dues called offerings, raffles, and food-selling drives. Money from these activities help to pay off mortgages and other church expenses.

The tragedy is that these fund-raising activities have taken precedence over the essence of the gospel. A kind of work-for-salvation-Christianity appears to be the Christian thing to do. Instead of calling people to full and authentic humanity, the people are called to work in fund-raising drives for the church. The church, rather than a local community, becomes the place for Christian witness and service. The missionary endeavor is neglected. While there are annual offerings to the large denominations for missionary

work, the essence of a Christian community that works to meet the needs of humanity has failed to emerge in many local Samoan churches.

As the author sees it, the traditional Samoan propensity for large and expansive church-buildings must be redirected to other more needful and healing kinds of ministries. Community outreach and social needs of the people must take precedence over physical facilities. The humanity of the local churches must take precedence over the idea of institutions. Human concern and human rights must be re-discovered in the local Samoan churches.

The constructive and encouraging aspects of the parish emphasis are hopeful. On the other hand, the spiritualistic tendencies and dualistic elements in Samoan Christianity are very damaging to authentic personhood. The institutionalization of the Gospel needs to be freed from the traditions and spiritualism of the Samoan Church. The ethnic Samoan Church needs to re-discover the Gospel of salvation as Jesus Christ preached and taught it. The Samoan Church has been guided by traditions far too long. It is high time that the Scriptures be given the opportunity and power to guide the Samoan Church as it should be guided. Here, the local church can become the point of departure for such an enormous and much needed task.

CHAPTER 4

TOWARDS A SAMOAN THEOLOGY

I. SAMOAN CHRISTIANITY IN A NEW THEOLOGICAL THRUST

A. The Present Focus

Langdon Gilkey has written a very penetrating book, How The Church Can Minister to the World Without Losing Itself. This title expresses part of the problem now existing in the Samoan Church. In its 150 years of ministry in Samoa, the Church has become comfortably allied with the "best" ethical thinking of its own culture. So in its conservative bent, the Church in Samoa is still defending the best ethos of fifty years ago. As a consequence, the Church in Samoa can no longer bring a real word of judgement to Samoan culture.

Today, the Church in Samoa and overseas, is guided more by traditions than by the teachings of Scriptures. Gilkey's statement is, therefore, most relevant to the Samoan Church:

All through the centuries the Church has in one way or another been conscious that, like its Lord, his teaching, and its own hopes, it is in but not of the world.. ..The Church, then, if it is to be itself and do its work, must mediate to the world some Word, some Presence, some norm and standard, that are both transcendent in their origin--in some measure holy--and also relevant to the world's life. ¹

¹Langdon Gilkey, How The Church Can Minister to the World Without Losing Itself, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) p.2.

Gilkey believes that the basic problem in the church today is its "worldliness." The church has failed to disturb its culture with a prophetic word of judgement or of healing, because the church itself has become an expression of its culture.

The church, says Gilkey, must somehow express holiness and transcendence in a way that is relevant to the life of the world. By holiness and transcendence he means that which comes from beyond any particular culture to judge and heal it.

Gilkey speaks with utmost relevancy to the Samoan Church. For the Samoan immigrants in the United States, the present condition of the Samoan churches in America directly conflicts with their immigrant urge for a meaningful survival in a different environment. This is because priorities within the church are still oriented toward the preservation of property and structural and hierarchical glorification. So the present state of leadership, especially in the Congregational Christian Churches, continues to find support of the Church in Samoa to their liking. The status quo is in their favor. And their authority and leadership come from the mother Church in Samoa. Strong affiliation with the Church in Samoa takes priority over affiliation to the United Church of Christ.

So the focus of the Samoan Church in America continues to be Samoa, rather than their Samoan-American context.

Any considerations of their present condition in terms of their experience as immigrants in America are never discussed in church meetings or gatherings. The questions of culture conflict or culture assimilation are never raised. Normally, such questions only surface in times of crisis. The second and third generations are beginning to address them, but the emphasis from the leaders is always to preserve the status quo, to preserve traditions. This emphasis continues to be felt in many families who make up church membership. So the Samoan customs and traditions reinforce Samoan Christianity in family life.

Samoan Christianity revolves around the traditional distinction between the sacred and the secular realms, with religion confined to the former. This is the traditional Christian sphere of the monastery and religious "good works." This kind of Christianity has become a detriment to the urge for liberation and full humanization of the Samoan immigrant. In addition, the concern for personal salvation with its corresponding works of piety developing the "inner life" of the believer appears to prohibit the development of full and authentic humanity.

The Congregational Christian Churches, representing the major denomination among Samoan Christianity, have become a burden to the Samoan immigrants. While the churches have become good places for the immigrants to meet socially and relate to their own culture, it does more harm than good.

The people are judged by the effort and work they contribute to the maintenance of the church. People usually spend five to six days either doing some chores, raising money, or worshipping in the church. The church becomes so important in their lives that community life is blocked out completely. The people are isolated from society. And the minister, who is also isolated from the community at large, encourages active participation, since it is a sign of the growth of the church.

From these five to six days spent in church, there are hardly any learning experiences or faith explorations. The primary concern is for the financial obligations of the church. For the Samoan churches are still in the initial stage of development, trying to pay off mortgages and other church indebtedness. The people simply do it themselves. There is no financial charity from anywhere else. Even when the people visit together, they normally relate to each other in a very superficial way.

Economic factors in America, however, contradict this Samoan urge to support the financial needs of the church. Many Samoan families are still in the low-income brackets. Those with modest incomes usually move out of the church, or return to Samoa. Many older people and retired relatives from Samoa are supported by their children who are also active and contributing members in the church.

The ideology behind all this is that the people are to serve the church, not vice versa. It is customary in Samoa

for the people to serve institutions, such as the extended family or the hierarchy of the village chiefs. These institutions take precedence over individual or personal freedom. This same ideology now dominates church life. In the extended family tradition, for example, the title of the family takes precedence over human rights.

The more meaningful and immediate social concerns as related in the first three chapters of this project are never addressed by the church. The social concerns common to all immigrants are pushed aside as belonging to the secular sphere.

It is against this kind of Christianity that a pattern of behavior which appears to be common throughout the Samoan churches in Hawaii and California has emerged. There is a very strong tendency in the Samoan community to move towards individuality: that is, away from the church and from the extended family relationships. This is not an influence from American society, but American society provides the setting and freedom for this movement. This is the Samoa "come of age." Society in America provides the force and opportunity for that "self-made" image, breaking the strength and organization of communal life in Samoa. Economic factors and job security have given Samoan individuals the power to see life in a totally different perspective. Unfortunately, the short-sightedness of the Samoan leadership fails to comprehend this vital stage of Samoan maturity. On the surface it

appears to diminish church membership, but at the depth, it is God's way of calling the Samoan people to full and authentic humanity. This is the real meaning of their immigrant experience.

This movement towards individuality, while it does appear to break the communal system of Samoan living, will return to a more meaningful and stronger tie to the Samoan structure of community. The experience of individuality allows the people to reflect critically on the communal living of their culture. This critical reflection will bring greater appreciation and understanding of their culture, for individuality can only be a temporary urge to break away while experiencing a different lifestyle in a new environment. As maturity increases, immigrants realize that they need to affirm their culture and deal with identity problems as they come to the surface. That is why many Samoan families, after living in America for many years, have returned to Samoa with much greater appreciation of their communal culture. Many of these people who have returned are now important leaders in the Samoan government. Many are also holders of high titles in villages and counties.

The movement towards individuality is part of the freedom and independence of the immigrant experience. Freedom does not come as a threat, but as a stage in the process of maturity as Samoans encounter a technological society. The means and opportunity are available to the Samoans as

they, like all immigrants, discover the social mobility of American life. Unfortunately, the return to the communal aspects of Samoan life, after gaining a greater appreciation of their own culture, is not so easy. Many Samoans, while living in our culturally different society, move towards individuality. Perhaps this is inevitable. Numerous factors and elements are involved in the process, and people will behave accordingly.

From the author's point of view, the church, the dominating factor in the life of a Samoan immigrant, has become irrelevant. The Samoan Church has failed to speak with relevance to the Samoan's immigrant experience. The Samoan Church is lagging behind in its role as the community that brings salvation to the identity crisis of the Samoan immigrants. While the Samoan immigrants live out the process of maturity in a new society, as they experience "coming of age" in a technological environment, the church attacks them as unfaithful to God and country.

Like the younger son in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the Samoans have come to a far country. In their plight they have learned to make decisions and carry important responsibilities that come with maturity. They have become citizens of a great country. They have "come of age" in a different society. More important, it is in a technological society that they have "come of age." This is their strength and gift from their God. The Samoan Church has failed to

address them at their God-given humanization. The older generation of ministers continues to preach a dualistic theology that does not apply to their immigrant experience. The ministers have failed to keep up with the sociological changes that their people are now exposed to. Instead of dealing with the immigrant problem constructively, the ministers become defensive of the old theology.

B. Some Insights from Contemporary Western Theologians

Against this kind of Christianity presently existing within the Samoan community, God calls the Samoan people to serve the world in which they find themselves, caring not first for their own salvation but for the welfare of their neighbor. In this caring for the neighbor, they will find their salvation.

This means that the Samoan Church must learn to distinguish between true and false spirituality. Spirituality has been a major thrust in the old theology, and this must be corrected. Donald Baillie, writing in the The Theology of the Sacraments, notes that the New Testament never uses "Spiritual" (pneumatikos) in antithesis to the bodily (somaticos). "There is no opposition between the spirit and body, for there is even such a thing as a spiritual body (some pneumatikon)."²

²Donald M. Daillie, The Theology of the Sacraments (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 48.

Donald Baillie goes on to say that the New Testament does not make any opposition between the spiritual (pneumatikos) and the natural (physikos). So St. Paul's Greek word for "natural" is not physikon but psychikon, which means "pertaining to the psyche as distinct from the pneuma."³

Moreover, Donald Baillie relates that in the Bible, flesh does not mean the body, and the distinction that we make between the soul and the body is not the same as the distinction between the spirit and the body in the New Testament. In the New Testament, flesh (sarx) means human nature, the whole of it; in the Pauline sense it means "fallen" human nature. "But it is not the bodily part of man that is evil in human nature."⁴

The carnal is not the bodily. The word "sarkikos" in the New Testament might almost be translated "human" in antithesis to "divine;" and the spiritual means that higher realm which is the realm of God's action, that higher element in man which is distinguished from the merely natural biological element and which man does not possess at all except in his relation to God.⁵

Baillie's clarification of the Biblical teachings of the body and spirit is very significant for theology in the Samoan context. It helps to point out the mistake that dualistic theology teaches, and it finds its roots in the heresy

³Ibid., p. 48.

⁴Ibid., p. 48.

⁵Ibid., p. 48.

of docetism, which is the denial of Jesus Christ's full humanity. The world and all flesh are by definition evil, according to the docetist doctrine.

Moreover, Baillie's idea of "spiritual" as "personal" in our modern sense is very meaningful to the communal living of the Samoan people. A man living in the "psychikos" and the "sarkikos" is what Baillie calls "a sub-personal life." True life, therefore, is that lived in personal communion with other persons, "and above all in that basic personal relationship with God which we call religion."⁶

In view of the Samoan corporate personality of community living. Baillie's discussion of body and spirit really comes across. Samoan society has no place for individuality. Every person is an important part of the corporate and communal aspects of Samoan society. The similarity between the corporate personality of Samoa and that of the Biblical Hebrews has a lot to say to the human predicament. The Samoan Church has failed to understand this concept because of the false understanding of spirituality. As pointed out by the author, the Samoans have a very strong spiritualistic tendency, even in the pagan religions, and Baillie's clarification of the Biblical standpoint is very significant.

⁶Ibid., p. 49.

In addition to Donald Baillie, theologians like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth have discussed at great length the theological dilemma now existing in Samoan Christianity. Bonhoeffer and Barth's discussion is based on the distinction between the Biblical faith and "religion." In the Old Testament we see the prophets engaged in a mortal battle with religious activities that took the form of idolatry. In the New Testament we see religious leaders providing the primary opposition to Jesus. As Reinhold Niebuhr warned us sometime ago, religion is not necessarily good; it may even be man's final stronghold against God.⁷

Karl Barth made the distinction between Christian faith and religion so sharp that he could title one of the sections of his Dogmatics "The Revelation of God as Abolition of Religion." Barth defines religion as man's search for God and distinguishes it from revelation, which is God's search for man. In religion, man "finds" the god that he wants to find and thus his religion becomes a wall between him and God. In religion, including the Christian religion, man speaks, but in revelation God calls man to listen.⁸

Barth reminds us that Christian religion is not less idolatrous than other religions. He does not advocate a

⁷Dan Rhoades, Lectures on Christian Ethics, School of Theology, Spring, 1971.

⁸Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh: Clark, 1957), I/2, pp. 280-361.

"religionless Christianity," either. According to Barth, the Christian has faith that just as the sinner is justified, so God's grace may redeem sinful religion. "Revelation can adopt religion and mark it off as true religion."⁹

Barth forces Christians to look upon their religious life with a radical humility. The dichotomies that they make between religion and the world, or the sacred and the profane, are called into question. Religion, as man's idolatrous flight from God, is found on both sides of all such dichotomies. Barth helps us to see why the prophets and Jesus found their opponents among the religious people. The Samoans are also a very religious people.

Barth's distinction between faith and religion leads to a rejection of the common division between religious and secular life. The Bible, he tells us, has no idea of a "special religious activity." Christians are not called to a few particular "religious" action; they are called to serve God "in the whole range of their humanity."¹⁰ The salvation of the individual Christian is not the final meaning of God's grace or the final aim of Christian life. The Christian is called to love God's world even in its fallen state.

⁹Ibid., I/2, p. 326.

¹⁰Ibid, III/2, p. 410.

The Christian must serve God in the secular sphere, in economics and politics, as well as the academic and aesthetic realms.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer also argued the Christian life is not a salvation from the world. Instead, the Christian must live a "worldly" life; he must not strive to be a saint, the Christian must strive to be a man. "Jesus does not call men to a new religion, but to life."¹¹ The Christian believes in the Jesus Christ who took the worldly paths of weakness and suffering. Likewise, the Christian must take life in his stride, entering into the ways of the world to serve God.

Both Barth and Bonhoeffer speak of the Christian life in the context of concern for the total life of the world. The Christian life that both men advocate cannot be limited to one's particular culture or personal and family habits; it must also include the way one votes and participates in the political arena and how one acts in the social struggles of our day.

C. The Samoan Pastor's New Role

This means that for the Samoan Church, a total reversal of the theological emphasis and focus is called for.

¹¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Prisoner For God (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 167.

The vertical relationship to God must be relevant to the social needs of the Samoan immigrants. Langdon Gilkey has reminded us that the church must express holiness and transcendence in a way that is relevant to the life of the world. This means that Samoan Christianity must explore the horizontal aspects of her relationship with God. That means finding God, not in heaven anymore, but in neighbors. Service and work for God must be understood as service and work for humanity, for the neighbor and for the world, for this is their salvation.

To achieve this radical reversal of the theological emphasis, a concept of mission, based on a new conception of the Biblical God needs to be discovered with new vitality. The Samoan Church has lost the vitality and radicalness of the Biblical God who continues to work for full and authentic humanity.

The emphasis on mission will help reverse the Samoan structure of the church, which has turned the spiritual life into a mundane, routine, and very formalistic way of life. The Samoan Church is too much culturally-bound. The church has become the best expression of its culture. And a concept of mission may well be the judgement and healing for the Samoan Church.

A sense of mission means a new apprehension of the spirit of Christ: The Christ who "lived for others."

Ultimate concern for the neighbor, and eventually the world, must be a top priority for the Samoan Church.

This means that the chiefs must enlarge their political egos beyond personal ambition or cultural ties. They must see the spirit of Christ in its missionary outreach, endeavoring to meet the needs of a crying and hungry humanity. The spirit of Christ must take precedence over cultural or political ambitions. The church must serve the needs of its people, but not vice versa.

This means that the setting of the local church in a village can no longer be guided by the traditional political hierarchy. The missionary spirit of Christ must become the key factor in setting all church policies. The traditional roles of the chiefs must be re-structured in such a way that church policies and management are not put in conflict.

This will place the pastor in a very strategic position. The pastor's role as chief administrator of the local church will be very significant. The new emphasis of the local church will depend on how successfully the pastor can function as minister and administrator. The pastor will no longer be confined to spiritual matters per se. The new structure of the local church requires him/her to function as chief administrator. Strengthening this role of the pastor will also minimize the influence of the village hierarchy of

chiefs in church affairs. This is necessary because the chief's influence comes out of a cultural and political bias.

On the other hand, the church constitution and By-laws must also allow the congregations to check the powers of the minister. The temptation to be a dictator in church matters is inevitable in the pastor's new role. This is why the laws of incorporation for a non-profit corporation like the church are necessary requirements for any new church in the States. This is a legal requirement that is missing for the local church in Samoa. Laws requiring a constitution and By-laws for all local churches mean a check for the balance of power between each minister and the congregation.

These legal requirements for the local church will also mean a clear and precise knowledge on the part of the parishioners about the powers and functions of their pastor. The pastor will also understand his/her obligations and duties. This mutual understanding will alleviate a paternal kind of relationship between the pastor and congregation, which has favored the chiefs and elders over against the youths.

From this clear and precise position of leadership, the pastor can begin to initiate the free and open fellowship of brothers and sisters in the spirit of Christ in a more realistic and practical manner. This means that the pastor can reach each member of the local church in a more

personal way, rather than through the protocol of the village hierarchy or chiefs of extended families.

Let me sum up the new role of the Samoan pastor by relating John Calvin's description of the office of pastor.¹² Calvin suggested that the pastoral office consisted of three parts: prophetic, priestly, and kingly. Calvin maintained the three activities by the pastor as necessary for our knowledge of God's work in Christ. These functions are of equal importance to the life and well-being of the church and are necessary to provide a balanced ministry.

Samoan pastors have totally neglected the prophetic and kingly, or administrative, aspects of the pastoral office. And this is largely due to the Samoan structure of the local church. To offset this traditional role of the pastor, Calvin's suggestion of the prophetic and kingly roles must now be a top priority in the Samoan ministry. As I see it, only then will the Samoan people come to understand the significance of the mission of the church. For a sense of mission means the focus on an awareness of direction, purpose, and a reason for being. The mission of the church becomes the standard of measurement for all activity. Hence, the Samoan's active participation in church life must

¹²Alvin J. Lindgren and Norman Shawchuck, Management for Your Church (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), pp. 16-17.

now be understood as part of the Christian's total mission to the world. The Samoan Church must exist, not for their own Samoa only, but for the world; for it is God's world. The author sees this as a very significant consciousness for the Samoan Church. Global consciousness now becomes a significant challenge to the Samoan people and the Samoan Church, both at home and abroad.

CHAPTER 4

II. A NEW CONCEPTION OF GOD

A. Preliminary Remarks

A theology for Samoan Christian immigrants in the United States must be both relevant to Samoan-American concerns, and meaningful to a more universal understanding of the Christian faith. The foundations, therefore, are the experiences of the Samoan Christian immigrants. But their experience does not begin in their new American environment, for the roots of their immigrant experience lies at home in Samoa. That is why the second chapter of this project dealt with the beginning of Christianity in Samoa.

Gustavo Gutierrez in A Theology of Liberation writes about "Theology as critical reflection on praxis."¹³ His definition of theology substantiates the groundwork for a theology of Samoan immigrants.

Theological reflection would then necessarily be a criticism of society and the Church insofar as they are called and addressed by the Word of God; it would be a critical theory, worked out in the light of the Word accepted in faith and inspired by a practical purpose --and therefore indissolubly linked to historical praxis.¹⁴

¹³Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 11.

¹⁴Ibid.

Gutierrez's definition "suggests that our concern ought to be for making sense of, and giving direction to, Christian involvement in history."¹⁵ This means that the purpose of theology will be to organize and systematize this concern. The goal of theology will be the liberation and humanization of people as understood in the light of the Word of God.

For the Samoan community, critical reflection on praxis means critical reflection on the total Samoan immigrant experience. We must begin with their immigrant experience and ultimately relate that experience to the Word of God. Consequently, the significant contribution of the Samoan experience to a deeper understanding of faith will emerge. It is here that the usefulness and validity for a Samoan immigrant theology will also emerge.

Wesley Woo, writing in The Theologies of Asian Americans and Pacific Peoples,¹⁶ gives some useful guidelines for developing theology:

1. theology must keep integrity with faith in a God who calls us to full and authentic humanity. Thus it is that theology must be rooted in Scripture. Anything less and all we end up with is the proof-text for an Asian American Ideology.¹⁷

¹⁵ Wesley Woo, in Roy Sano (Compiler), Theologies of Asian Americans and Pacific Peoples (Berkeley: Pacific School of Religion, 1976), p. 354.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 355 ff.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 353 ff.

This guideline applies as well to the Samoan Christian context. Woo also cautions us in the matter of interpretation of Scripture, namely, the particularity of each culture must help to focus the work of interpretation. This is very important since God's love for all humanity, in all particularity, continues to be manifested in and through history.

Wesley Woo relates the other two guidelines:

2. Any theologizing must generate insight-action. That is, it must provide insight that leads to, and manifests itself in, action....When a lawyer asked Jesus who his neighbor was, he was told the parable of the God Samaritan and told, "Go and do likewise." Thus a question regarding being is answered in terms of doing.
- 3.. Any theologizing in an Asian-American perspective should be done in a corporate context...that is, first, it must be rooted in the Asian-American experience, and second, theology must be nurtured in the midst of an Asian-American Christian community.¹⁸

These two guidelines relate to actual moments of life. They deal with concrete human life, which is the point of departure for all theological reflection. Theology can no longer be considered in a vacuum, it must articulate the experience and history of a people. In the third guideline, the Biblical understanding of the interdependent nature of humanity continues to be emphasized. This is also very consistent with the nature of Samoan Christian immigrant

¹⁸Ibid.

phenomenon. These three guidelines become very significant in the theology which this final chapter is attempting.

B. A New Conception of God

As the Samoan people go through their exodus experience from Samoa to America, the Christ and culture problem becomes acute. The Samoan Church has not consciously dealt with the problem. The author firmly believes that the Samoan Church must listen to the Asian-American communities who have long dealt with the Christ and culture problem. This is because tragedies and racism are more painful in the Asian-American experience. Identity crises have resulted in oppression and rejection for the Asian-Americans.

For the Samoan-American community, however, the identity crisis is mostly on the unconscious level. Samoans have not yet reached the stage where the identity crisis becomes as painful as it has become for Asian-Americans. Strong reliance on the extended family in America and a strong culture consciousness affirmed in the church alleviates identity crises for many Samoans. Critical reflection on identity problems is very minimal among the Samoan people, but it is beginning to emerge among the second and third generations.

Samoans are very much culture-conscious. Families continue to help each other, especially the extended family. The Samoan Church has reinforced this culture-consciousness here in the United States. The communal system with its

matai as a built-in security for the extended family continues to function with success in the States. That is, the matai is responsible for anything that happens to all members of the extended family. Many Samoan churches in Hawaii and California are built on the extended family system. The chief's influence and authority continues to draw the extended family members to the church that he is a member of. The structure of the Samoan local church allows the chief to continue his authority and influence among their people. This dominance of the chiefs in a local church becomes a hazard to the free and open fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ. The significance of the Christian fellowship in Christ has not emerged due to the emphasis on the Samoan structure of the local church.

While the Samoan Church offers the opportunity for the people to relate to each other in their own culture, I have failed to experience the uniqueness and power of the Christian faith in the Samoan local church. I think it is too much culturally-bound. The indigenous beliefs of our people are much stronger in the local parish than the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, this is not the opinion of our present leaders. Many chiefs and older ministers continue to believe that Samoan culture is necessary for the work of God among our people. The senior ministers who continue to act as our leaders continue to enforce the Samoan structure of the church. So the church is bogged

down by traditions and the status quo. The church is not moving anywhere. Its only concern is survival. There is no vision. The church has become defensive of its own culture and the best ethos of its time. It is an old theology trying to hang on to something that is totally irrelevant to people who are now citizens of a technological society.

To offset this highly integrated condition of the Christian faith with traditional Samoan social structure, a new conception of God is called for. The Samoan Church needs to recover the God who calls people to full and authentic humanity. This God is the Biblical God of the risen Christ who died, but now frees the believer to live toward the future, "rather than attempting to defend, repeat, or destroy the past...."¹⁹

The discover of this God means the reality of salvation for the Samoan people, salvation as attested to in Scriptures. I firmly believe that the Samoan people have not experienced the Biblical meaning of salvation. For the Samoan community, the fulfillment of the doctrine of salvation lies in their understanding and experience of the God who continues to work for the salvation of the people under bondage. And the Samoan people have been slaves to their culture, religion, and the worst of all utopia, the status quo.

¹⁹Cobb, Jr. Ibid, p. 59.

In this context, salvation means fullness of life. This would include the whole person's personality, economy, social life and spiritual enlightenment. Each person would be saved and brought into fullness of life when he/she is helped, loved, and healed. This is the will of God for all humanity. Hence, the Samoan people need to experience this God who calls people to full and authentic humanity. Wesley Woo's guideline is, therefore, very significant.

The presupposition is that a very different conception of God exists among the Samoan Christians. This is quite true. The present theological insights about the nature of God need to be reexamined within the Samoan context. Some of these insights have been treated in the previous sections. The God that the Samoan community appears to believe in and are now worshipping is very different from the God who calls people to full and authentic humanity.

Thus, the important question is, if Christianity has been in Samoa for 150 years, how has it come about that Samoa is experiencing a very different God? Paul Tillich reminds us that idolatrous deviation is inevitable in the Christian faith.²⁰ Since Samoan Christianity is syncretistic in nature, yielding to the temptation of idolatry comes easily.

²⁰Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 104..

Karl Barth's utter rejection of idolatry is poignant here. Barth rejected the identification of the Christian message with any particular political or social idea. Out of Barth's fundamental principle, the absoluteness of God, he clearly saw the danger of idolatry.²¹

Paul Tillich, writing in Dynamics of Faith, points out the possibility and inevitability of idolatrous deviations. "Religiously speaking, there may be an idolatrous element in one's faith."²²

Tillich goes on to relate the cross as the criterion to measure idolatrous abuse of the Christian faith. Any conception of the God that Christianity preaches must focus on the climax of the Christ-event, namely, the cross. The cross remains as the most powerful symbol of God's revelation in history. Mysteriously, the cross reveals the nature and being of God as a suffering God. God suffers in humanity, for humanity, in order to liberate humanity from all bondage.

Here, I am reminded of Isaiah 46:1-4. This is the prophet's picture of the true God who carries His people and the false gods of the surrounding nations. The false gods cannot do anything for the people, they have to be carried by the people. So these gods become burdens to the people.

²¹Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957).

²²Tillich, Ibid., p. 104.

It is a prophetic picture of the two kinds of religion that have always been contained within Christian circles. There is the kind of religion that does nothing for the people, but has to be carried as a burden. Then there is that kind of religion that can do something for the people, carrying their burden and carrying them.

This prophetic comparison recalls the pagan religions of Samoa, contrasted to the Christian religion that was brought by the missionaries 150 years ago. Like all pagan and heathen religions, the gods have to be carried by the people. These gods are like statues: great glitterings of silver and gold that are still only a piece of furniture. That was the so-called religion in Samoa before Christianity. In the light of the integration of Christianity with Samoan religion, rather than Christianity remolding and changing this pagan idea of god, the old Samoan idea of god continues to exist within Samoan Christianity.

This concept of deity primarily explains the traditional Samoan propensity for large and expensive church buildings. It is a monument to the gods, or to the Samoan culture trait of pride. It is not the essence of Christianity to build large and expensive church facilities, especially when economic factors do not allow it. The Samoan people are in the very low-income bracket, and yet, this traditional Samoan propensity for church building has found ample scope in California. Today, instead of the church seeking

ways of healing ministries and faith explorations, the Samoan urge to build and maintain large and expensive church facilities continues to dominate Samoan Christianity.

To overcome this tragedy, the author believes that a new apprehension and understanding of the Biblical God needs to be discovered by the Samoan Church. Here, the prophet's vision of the true God is significantly radical. The God who says,

Hearken unto me, O House of Jacob, and all remnant of the House of Israel, which have been carried by me from your birth, yea, carried from the womb; and even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you; I have made, and I will bear; yea, I will cary, and I will deliver you. 23

This is the essence of the Christian faith---It is about the God who comes to seek humanity before humanity seeks God. This is the "radiance" of the Christian religion that Samoan Christianity needs to rediscover.

The prophet Isaiah had indeed pictured God as a shepherd to His people, gathering the lambs in His arms and carrying them in His bosom. In the New Testament, Jesus went further. He pictured the Divine Shepherd going out into the wilderness to seek the lost sheep that could never otherwise have even begun to find the fold. "And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."²⁴

²³Isaiah 46:3-4.

²⁴Luke 15:5.

That was Christ's picture of God. That was new; and it is the very heart of Christianity. There is nothing fancy about it, or anything intellectual; it is basically the teaching of the Scriptures. We have only to read the Bible with an understanding mind and open and humble heart.

The leaders of the Samoan churches need to be reminded of the absolutely incomparable message of the Gospel--that God comes to us, and we can go to God only because God has come first to us. This is the theological thrust that was rediscovered by the great theologian Karl Barth. Barth reminds us of the God who does things for us, anticipates us, comes in quest of us, and carries us all the way.

Christianity in Samoa has always emphasized man's quest for God. This goes well in hand with the pride and dignity of a proud Polynesian people. It is good, but it is not the whole truth. Samoan Christianity is great in human discipline and human effort, but this is not the whole truth. There is also the divine initiative. And this is exactly where the Samoan Church has been lost.

Samoan Christianity must realize with great humility that Samoa could never seek God if God had not first been seeking them. "That is the other side of it, and it really comes first, for God is always beforehand with us."²⁵

²⁵Donald Baillie M., Out of Nazareth (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 15.

The Gospel of the Incarnation speaks of a God on the downward quest. Donald Baillie sums it up this way,

It was God coming in quest of humanity, breaking all His records, coming further into the wilderness than ever before, that He might find us and lay us upon His shoulders rejoicing. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself." 26

This is the God that gives strength to a minority in a pluralistic society like America. This is the God for all immigrants. This God empowers the lowly and downcast. This God brings hope and strength to the oppressed. It is strength that comes out of humility; the kind of humility that empowered the man Jesus to be "one with the Father." His oneness with the Father gave Him the courage and strength to endure the sufferings that found its climax upon the cross.

This is the only God that can help the Samoan Christians in the United States. It is the only God who continues to work for liberation and humanization of all people. As Samoan Christians establish themselves in American society, they are set on a course of life that is bound for culture shock and identity confusion. Acculturation may also be necessary in some areas. As Samoans become active Christians in the local church, they will be challenged by the power of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. It is a power that does not negate a people's salvation unto fullness of life. On the contrary, they will ultimately discover the God who wills

²⁶Ibid.

liberation to full and authentic humanity. A.C. Ubalde, Jr., a Filipino of immigrant descent, sums up this vision of the true God:

...no longer the God as "needfulfiller the "problem solver." (Ubalde) suggests a messianic God who experiences with his people the explosive happenings in human life which 1) empower men for responsible action, 2) open up new possibilities for self-actualization of human nature, 3) enable all men to participate in the shaping of their own lives and the life of the world, 4) and lastly address men at the point of their strength.²⁷

C. Other Biblical Insights

The present conception of deity within the Samoan community continues to reflect indigenous elements. The old pagan fear that ruled Samoans' relationship to the gods in the pre-missionary days had never died. It continues to rule the pastor-congregation relationship. So the minister is isolated from the everyday problems of the people. A feeling of shame discourages the people to share their problems with the pastor. But more important, the strong cultural structure of the Samoan Church continues to reflect this pagan fear. Moreover, this same pagan fear materializes in a paternalistic image which the people ascribe to the pastor. Thus, to break away from this empty and paternalistic kind of pastor-congregation relationship based on fear

²⁷A.C. Ubalde, Jr., in Roy Sano, Ibid.

is an initiative that will have to come from a profound awareness of the Biblical God.

The wrath, judgement, and holiness of God are the more popular attributes of deity within the old Church structure. It is a structure that is based on authority and is communal in nature. In this structure, one's total relationship to the gods was in terms of fear. This fear forces one to obey the will of God. Punishment is the direct consequence of disobedience; hence, outward observances become the norm for a Christian lifestyle. Samoan formalism, based on the corporate idea of humanity, has failed to do justice to the Biblical concept of a personal relationship to God. That is why the pastor-congregation relationship appears to be very impersonal.

The love of God continues to be a foreign idea that has failed to find roots in a people who have been accustomed to a culture where institutions take precedence over people. Integrity and genuineness are easily overtaken by sentimentalism and romanticism, since paternalistic feelings are high in communal and extended family living. But in order for the love of God to be a reality for Samoan people, it must first be experienced in personal relationship. This is the Biblical concept of the personal relationship with God. The individual, although a corporate member of the community, must experience a meaningful relationship with God. Ultimate issues in life must first be realized and affirmed

through individual experience. The question of meaning is a very personal issue. In the Old Testament, this is prophetic religion.

It is not personal experience or individuality over against the community, but personal experience for the sake of the community. It must be remembered that the elaborate formalism of Samoan custom has gone well in hand with some aspects of Christianity, while the individual responsibility through private prayer and study has accorded far less easily with Samoan habits.²⁸

To achieve this new conception of God based on prophetic religion, the Old Testament prophets must be consulted. Like Asian-American theology, Samoan theology is prophetic in style. The prophetic task is to effect change. According to J. Lindblom.

The task of the prophets was to arouse, rebuke, call to repentance, warn, and threaten with the judgement of Yahweh, and to promise a turn for the future in a coming age, on condition that there were some who realized the holy will of Yahweh.²⁹

This change must always be towards the purposes of God. For the Samoan people, this means repentance. Those who continue to teach a one-sided view of God, **that is,** the

²⁸J.W. Davidson, Samoa Mo Samoa (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 37.

²⁹J. Lindblom, Prophecy in Ancient Israel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 217.

god of oppression who is the originator of suffering, suppression, and degradation, must begin to meditate on the mercy and love of God.

This new conception of the Biblical God will become the focus for developing Samoan theology. This focus will serve as the unifying element in all immigrant experiences. This is the God who calls the Samoan people to full and authentic humanity.

A closer look at the Old Testament for guidance finds the exodus as the focal point for the subsequent history of Israel. Throughout the history of Israel, the exodus stands out as the creative event in their experience of Yahweh. In Exodus 15, Israel expresses its understanding of the significance of the exodus and all future experiences. The name Yahweh denoted the significance of the event. Only through "Yahweh" did the experience become relevant and comprehensible.

For Israel, the name Yahweh meant a special way of being, a special way of being human; namely, a way of being historical, of consciously living one's temporariness within one's space-time limitations. In addition, hidden behind the name of Yahweh may lie the insight that there is a second dimension to being human, a being which transcends individual, group, or temporary, limited being. Being human was perhaps understood here as a way of living which is never complete but always in the process of becoming. Yahweh's demand for faithfulness which pervades the whole Old Testament could

have been understood, then, as a call for a commitment to a way of being human which was based on a knowledge of that initial revelation, i.e., the exodus experience, and on the need for constant re-affirmation of the original understanding of that experience.

The exodus event formed the basis for a bond and served as a focal point, as the unifying element among the various groups which later became the nation of Israel. The exodus was a beginning. It was the emergence of something qualitatively new. The understanding of the exodus was a creative act repeated by subsequent generations of Israelites. In saga and legend, poem and song, the significance of the exodus was celebrated as Israel's initial encounter with Yahweh. Through those celebrations the people affirmed their way of life as a continuation of the exodus. For the subsequent generations of Israelites the exodus was not something which had occurred once in the distant past. It was something which was concluded and consummated but something which provided constant challenge and demanded ever new acceptance, understanding, and commitment.

The presence of a focus permits man to see the hidden, the unknown, as potential rather than only as a threat. In Israel the commitment to a Yahweh-way-of-being, to history as significant, provided the necessary focus on what was essential. Everything non-essential, peripheral, or distracting was excluded (Yahweh was viewed as a jealous

god!)). In addition, the Yahweh-way-of-being did not lend itself to lasting definition. The essential hiddenness of its intent called for continued disclosure and affirmation of what was disclosed. True, Israel was always conscious of the potential threat which resulted from a lack of permanent definition of the Yahweh-way-of-being. At times the threat proved too overwhelming, and the people "whored after other gods," to use the language of the prophets. They preferred another way of life, more manageable with more surface security, than the Yahweh-way-of-being. On the other hand, the willingness to remain open to "him who comes," to accept the threat as a necessary and constructive aspect of historical existence, of the Yahweh-way-of-being, remained the creative undercurrent throughout Israel's history.

In the New Testament, the climax of the life of Christ in the cross reveals a God who endures human suffering in order to liberate all humanity under bondage. Even the cross is understood in terms of the exodus. It is central in the Christian's pilgrimage from despair to hope. The cross stands at the center of a person's exodus from sin to salvation, from the wilderness to the Promised Land. In the immigrant experience, the cross is central in the pilgrimage from the old country to the new one. The cross becomes the focus in their flight from the pains and grief of immigrant life to the promises and glory of a new lifestyle.

The process of becoming brings hope; for beyond the cross is the resurrection. The immigrant church is, therefore, an "Exodus Church." It is a church that is always on the move, a pilgrim church that includes people who are in the plight of becoming the people of God. This is the theme of the New Testament book of Hebrews. Hebrews is, therefore, a very significant book for the Samoan immigrant experience.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this project, the experiences of the Samoan Christian immigrants have been articulated in all their social and theological dimensions. Critical reflection of their Christian faith has been traced to its unique culture and habits in Samoa. The work of the missionaries in the light of Samoan customs and how they influence their Christian lifestyle in the United States were critically analyzed. Theological reflection began in their experiences and how they relate to Biblical traditions. Valuable insights for a theological approach to their immigrant experience were found primarily in the Bible and in some writings of some contemporary Western theologians like Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Donald Baillie, Langdon Gilkey, Paul Tillich, Jurgen Moltmann, and in some Asian-American theologies.

These theological insights has given the author the insights and courage to critique Samoan Christianity in a constructive manner. The focus coming out of these theological analyses will provide the direction and purpose of the Samoan Church in the future, both in America and hopefully in Samoa.

While the theological enterprise offers no model for an immigrant theology, there are many theologies developed

out of different cultural contexts. The first three chapters of this project have more to do with cultural analysis. On the other hand, this is really the contextualization of theology, since theology cannot be developed in a vacuum anymore. Contextual theology begins with the biography and story of a people. For the Samoan immigrants, the theological process develops out of their unique cultural encounter in America.

As Wesley Woo has reminded the Asian-American community, that theology must be rooted in Scripture, so the Biblical traditions become of utmost significance in drawing up a theology for the Samoan Christian immigrants. So the Israelite experience in her exodus faith becomes the Biblical model for the Samoan immigrants. The Bible remains the expression of the faith of our people.

Just as Israel experienced a new dimension of their faith in Yahweh through the entrance into the Promised Land, so the Samoan people are experiencing a new awareness of their Christian faith in their immigrant experience. The social dimension of their Christian faith has now challenged the Samoan Church to re-formulate the old theology. The immigrant experience has finally brought home the truth that no theology is final or complete. Constant re-formulation and adaptation are necessary in order for theology to be dynamic and relevant to the people's lives; in this case, their

immigrant experience. Because of very close ties to their homeland, the mother Church is also challenged.

The immigrant experience, and the theological focus resulting from it are signs of the future for Samoan Christianity. It is a future that will focus on the people's unique cultural experiences. The purpose of the theological approach is to bring about a freer and more humane Christian lifestyle.

The focus is a new conception of the Biblical God who continues to bring new light and new hope in its 150 year old Church in Samoa. It is a church that has been tied down to the strong cultural demands of the Samoan consciousness. Samoan customs and traditions have wrinkled the Church of Jesus Christ, though in a very subtle and unconscious way. The Church has been the best expression of Samoan culture because there was never a prophetic voice to judge the church. The church leaders have for a long time been blinded by the "worse of all utopia, the status quo."¹ The status quo has always favored the leaders' elite positions of respect and authority.

God has heard the people's cry for freedom and liberation. God has come down to deliver the people to the Promised Land. Out of their immigrant experience comes the

¹Paul Schurman lectures based on Jurgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 21f.

awareness of affirmation of God's liberation in the Promised Land. A new environment means a new awareness of the revelation of God.

The author believes that mainline Christianity in Samoa was challenged by the Sects, namely, Pentecostal Groups, Mormons, and Seventh-Day Adventists. But the Samoan Church took a negative attitude toward the Sects. Ironically, the Sects continue to attract the Samoan people. Unless the Samoan Church begin to look at these Sects with the spirit of Christ, God may just continue to bring judgement upon the Samoan Church through these Sects.

The author believes that the immigrant experience has already awakened the Samoan Church to find its mission and purpose. Without mission and purpose, the well-being of any church becomes questionable. A sense of mission means the focus on an awareness of direction, purpose and a reason for being. The mission of the church becomes the standard of measurement for all activity.

The immigrant experience of the Samoan people has awakened global consciousness of Samoan Christianity. This global consciousness was a highlight period of Samoan Christianity when its missionary ministry to Papua, New Guinea, and other Pacific islands was strong. During the last 20 years, these missions have declined at such a rapid rate that at present, the author has no knowledge of any Samoan ministers

doing missionary work in New Guinea or other remote areas of the world.

Economic factors primarily explain this decline in missions. The Samoan Church has failed to develop successfully a dependable and supportive financial program in its 150 year old history. Its major source of income continues to come from the donations of church members who are in the very low-income bracket compared to the average American work-person. Even the present-day generation of clerical students fails to see missionary work as a priority. A minister is usually concerned with the financial problems of his/her own parish.

This is why the author firmly believes that the immigrant experiences of Samoan Christians in America and overseas is a vital challenge to Samoan Christianity. Out of their immigrant experience, the great missionary commandment found in Matthew 28:16-20 will again come alive in the Samoan Church. The sons and daughters of Samoa who have migrated to America will find this challenge to be their greatest contribution to their mother church, and to their host society in America, namely, that the Church of Jesus Christ, in whatever culture, continues to live out its missionary calling, "to make disciples of all nations."

For the Samoan Church, to be "Christ" to one's neighbor is a spiritual strength that will help to break its strong cultural particularity. For the Samoan immigrant

Church, to be "Christ" to its American neighbor, in its own unique Samoan Christian way, will add another distinct color to the pluralistic rainbow of Christian immigrants in the United States.

Since Samoa is very much culturally-bound, the extended family with its communal living appears to be very reliable in their immigrant experiences in America. While Samoan community living has created some social problems in the United States, it is still a great asset for Samoan immigrants. The social problems created will eventually be eliminated as the Samoans progress in the social mobility of American life.

More important, community living for Samoan immigrants has become a strong force in the enhancement of Samoan Christianity in America. As immigrants in a different society, especially a technological society like America, their problems are inevitable. What makes it even more difficult is that the church has failed to address these problems constructively. Being a silent minority in this pluralistic society makes it difficult to affirm the present predicament of the Samoan Christian immigrants.

Nevertheless, the corporate living of Samoans is perhaps their greatest contribution to American society. It is their greatest strength. Their life of sharing is most noble to the cause of humanity. They share their joy and pain in the spirit of a well-knit and helpful community.

In America, the concept of family has broken down drastically. Society in America is desperately trying to find meaning and value in the traditional concept of family. Once, it was believed that the so-called "nuclear" family would last, but that is now a thing of the past. Governmental statistics show that the children suffer most from the drastic breakdown of the American family.

Here, the Samoan community, together with other Asian-American communities who continue to find meaning and value in the age-old concept of family, can bring a spark of hope to a desperate society.

The Samoan Church must begin to reach the Samoan families in a theological approach. At present, the Samoan family stands out as the backbone of the cultural structure and framework of Samoan traditions and customs. That is why the social structure of the Samoan Church continues to reflect a strong cultural consciousness. The Samoan local church relies heavily on the extended family. This is where the popularity and influence of the chiefs is based and eventually becomes a power struggle against the clergy who do not believe in the policy of accommodation in church affairs.

A theological analysis of the Samoan family calls for some adjustments and modifications in a different environment, especially that of a technological society. Customary occasions such as weddings and funerals must be evaluated in their theological dimensions rather than only in their cultural

aspects. The God who wills full and authentic humanity must take precedence over customs and traditions.

The chiefs, who now reside in American society must also exercise their responsibilities as American citizens. They cannot continue to practice their isolated "faasamoa" while neglecting their social obligations as political leaders of their people living in America. Despite the conservatism of the chiefs, the exposure of their people to another way of life has begun to challenge the chiefs to live with openness and to critically reflect their immigrant experience in a foreign environment. It is the church that must play a leading role in this theological and cultural analysis.

Affirming the complications and hardships of immigrant life and the inevitable challenge now confronting the Samoan Church, it is the conviction of the author that the theological process is long overdue in Samoan Christianity. Theological reflection born out of the Samoan immigrant context overseas is a significant effort to create a freer and more humane Christian lifestyle. With the rise of ethnic theology that began in the Black Theology movement, now a priority among Asian-American communities, Samoans, as a silent minority in the United States, are now faced head-on with the same predicament.

It is the opportune time for the Samoan Church in America to begin to theologize their immigrant predicament.

In this theological analysis the Samoan Church will discover that the proclamation of the Good News of the New Conception of the Biblical God proposed in this project for the Samoan experience finds the cross of Jesus Christ as inevitable in immigrant life. The Good News of the Biblical God always has a cross. The cross is tragedy, it is so painful. Perhaps that is why the Samoan Church in America has failed to rise to the occasion. The challenge that their people encounter in a technological society is met through the comfortable cultural framework. The religious dimension is clothed in the cultural dimension. Cultural consciousness has limited the theological approach. A new discovery of the Biblical God is, therefore, of utmost significance to the Samoan encounter in America.

Consequently, the incarnational theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, centering on the cross, brings valuable insights to the Samoan cause. Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the sufferings that God endures upon the cross in order to help humanity can help the Samoan immigrants find meaning in the difficult challenge and hardships of immigrant life in America. It is the suffering God who can work and continues to work for the immigrant liberation.

God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross, He is weak and powerless in the World, and that is precisely the way, the only way in which he is with us. Matthew 8:17 make it quite clear that Christ helps

us...by virtue of his weakness and suffering. 2

For Bonhoeffer, only the suffering God can help us. The Christian must take life in his/her stride, entering into the ways of the world to serve God. Even Jesus Christ took the ways of weakness and suffering in his Godly ministry.

To find this God, the Biblical God that Bonhoeffer points out, the Samoan Church must search the Scriptures with renewed diligence. Samoans must re-read the Scriptures with a fresh perspective, a perspective of their own unique cultural setting. Only in the Scriptures will the Samoan people find this God, but they will experience this very God in their life as immigrants. Bonhoeffer says that "the Bible directs man to God's powerless and suffering."³ Participation in the sufferings of God in life is all part of the immigrants' Christian experience. While their experience means struggle and pain in the pursuit of a new lifestyle, they can also encounter the God who, like Israel of old, calls them "to go forth." It is the same God who was revealed in the exodus of Israel, was also present in the exodus of death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and now continues to be revealed in the exodus of immigrants from the old country

²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers From Prison (New York: Macmillan, 1978), p. 360.

³Ibid, p. 361.

to the new one. This is the God that will give meaning to the immigrant experience and bring hope for a brighter future.

As Israel was tempted to return to Egypt, Moses was encouraged by Yahweh to go forth, go forth into the Promised Land. Despite the "sea of reeds," despite the "Sons of Anak," Israel was commanded to go forth. The God who led them is the God who goes forth into the future: it is the God of the future.

The Samoan immigrants are called to go forth, to be open to the new challenges, new obligations, and the new missions that a new environment calls for. Their only hope is none other than the God who calls them to full and authentic humanity. God must lead them, not some cultural consciousness or tradition, not even the worse of all utopia, namely, the status quo, or some other human enterprise, only God can lead them into the future. The future belongs to God and will be manifested in a freer and more humane Christian lifestyle whereby the sons and daughters of Samoa can live out a full and authentic human life.

This new conception of the Biblical God, however, leads directly to the cross. The struggle and pain in the pursuit of a new Christian lifestyle means to encounter the Biblical God as revealed in the cross. The plight of the Samoan Christian immigrants has found the cross to be inevitable. Beyond the cross is the resurrection. There is hope beyond the cross. Since the cross and the resurrection is

one total event, since the resurrection developed and found form in the tragic experience of the cross; so the possibility of genuine hope emerges out of the hardships of immigrant life.

The pains and promises of immigrant life finds expression in the Gospel of the cross and resurrection. The promises of the Gospel mean liberation, and with this promise comes hope. Jurgen Moltmann has theologized that when a person takes the promises of God seriously, then he/she must begin to do something about it. The Samoan Church must begin to theologize, to critically reflect Christian faith in an immigrant setting. The hope of Samoan Christianity must find "in the resurrection of Christ not the eternality of heaven, but the future of the very earth on which his cross stands. It sees in him the future of the very humanity for which he died. That is why it finds the cross the hope of the earth."⁴

Jurgen Moltmann's Theology of Hope reminds us that Christianity is on the side of hope. The present has its meaning in its relation to the future. The future of Samoan Christianity in America cries for a theology of the present predicament. The theology developed out of their immigrant experience is their only hope, it is their future, for it is their God. Amen!

⁴Jurgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 21.

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